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THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

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The purpose of the Commission on Christian Higher Education is to develop basic philosophy and requisite programs within its assigned field; to awaken the entire public to the conviction that religion is essential to a complete education and that education is necessary in the achievement of progress; to foster a vital Christian life in college and university communities of the United States of America; to strengthen the Christian college, to promote religious instruction therein, and to emphasize the permanent necessity of higher education under distinctly Christian auspices.

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The Editor's Preface

It is significant that in the midst of an estimate of the role of science in the modern world the late Professor Alfred North Whitehead makes the assertion that "it is to literature that we must look, particularly in more concrete forms, namely in poetry and in drama, if we hope to discover the inward thoughts of a generation."¹ This is wholly in line with many thoughtful appraisals of the arts in general. At their best they are a mirror of man, recording in their changes man's changing ideas of himself, expressing that which gives human actions meaning and which enables him to live under the burden of a world view that increases continually in complexity and magnitude. From the standpoint of utilitarian conceptions of life, the human quest for order and his creation of order and perfection in art may be seen as an age-old luxury and even an idle pursuit. But it is certainly here, in such creative vision and production, that man reaches down to the very foundations of his being.

The authors of the essays which comprise this symposium on "Christianity and the Arts" have not only such an estimate of the arts but they are especially concerned to trace the more particular relationship between Christian faith and the arts — in history, in the realm of aesthetic judgment, and in contemporary expression in artistic forms. That the arts have a measure of true autonomy is not denied; but that they are acts of whole men, expressive, therefore, also of faith, is fully affirmed. Moreover,

¹ *Science and the Modern World*. New York: New American Library, Mentor Book, 1925, p. 76.

they are seen as correctives of hardness, desiccation, and pedantry of religion, the arts restoring a flexibility which even the devout life can ill afford to lose. But there is also the other direction of influence. Christians, as artists or scholars, are involved in the arts. The question is repeatedly asked: Are there forms of discrimination and criticism which take their shape from Christian faith? Or: What is the appropriate Christian appraisal of the modern artistic tradition? The perennial question which perhaps was given its earliest classical expression in St. Augustine is dealt with here: Is there a reflective Christian approach to the arts which includes a profound understanding of their history, the determination of aesthetic criteria, and a faithful discernment of contemporary creative endeavors?

There is no need, perhaps, for us to justify the raising of such questions in the pages of *The Christian Scholar*. Yet, it may be best to relate the framework of this issue to the more general problems of Christian faith and higher education. It seems obvious that all thoughtful scholars, whatever their field of specialized teaching and research, are aware of the arts as reflecting today our widespread feeling of living in a world of anxiety, restlessness, the monotony of standardized mechanization, the predominance of material interests — in other words, of forces which threaten the life of the spirit and make it more and more difficult to think or feel deeply or creatively about anything. In the arts we are revealed as we know we are. Though they cannot, at least

from Christian presuppositions, produce a saving faith, the arts can awaken the mind from too-easy acceptance of life's emptiness, and they can serve anew as means for communication between awakened minds and Christian insights into the dimensions of human life. Also, for the sake of the arts, Christian faith in God promises vision and direction as well as the promise of salvation from the capricious, arbitrary, or chaotic.

More generally still, it may be claimed that, when we ask for a sense of relation between Christian faith and the arts or indeed any area of creative thought and action, we at the same time involve ourselves in the wider question of the attitude adopted by the Christian tradition towards human culture and the development of man's creative capacity. Certainly it is apparent that at least two major interpretations of this relationship have maintained themselves throughout the history of Christianity. At one pole stands a general suspicion of culture and the development of human artistic and aesthetic capacities. When this negative stance is unqualified and unchecked, it can lead to an extreme moralism which virtually eliminates the aesthetic. (This

may be virtually the same as Western civilization's persistent tendency to set mechanized nature, amenable only to description and public knowledge, over against the realm of judgment and value, which is considered private and unverifiable.) At the opposite pole stands the view that the development of human capacities and the forms of civilization which they "create" are not opposed to the glory of God and human salvation. Whatever specific character the culture-affirming may take — and within Christianity distinctly different types must be acknowledged² — the endeavor to seek out the relation of the aesthetic to the claims of faith is both difficult and rewarding. And in this instance we can see the similarities between this concern and the other endeavors which seek to trace the relations of Christian faith to other areas of higher studies. Here we are reminded again, therefore, of the Christian claim, at least in the Protestant tradition, that the *whole* creation, including human creative capacities, is of God and that all human work in relation to it can be discharged "pro gloriam Dei."

² See, for example, H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1951.

Several book reviews pertinent to the theme, Christianity and the Arts, and two specially prepared bibliographies on "Religion and Literature" and "Religion and Visual Art" will be published in the March 1958 issue of *The Christian Scholar*.

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Christianity and the Arts

The Historic Divorce and the Contemporary Situation

AMOS N. WILDER

"Now that it has come of age, the world is more godless, and perhaps it is for that very reason nearer to God than ever before."

"It almost looks today as though the Church alone offers any prospect for the recovery of the sphere of freedom (art, education, friendship and play, 'aesthetic existence' as Kierkegaard called it)."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹

The gulf between the Church and the arts today — a gulf which is being significantly bridged over in our time from both sides — has a long and complex history. Adequate treatment of the matter would require attention to many periods of the past and special discussion, for example, of Catholic and Protestant, Lutheran and Calvinist aspects, to name only these traditions. In some circumstances the arts are obliged to insist on their own autonomy over against the pressures and claims of religion or politics, of church or state, or even of the reigning mandarins of art itself. Similarly there are times when religion is compelled for its very life to war on the symbols and the imaginations of its environment, even those of its family tradition, and to go into the desert for a period of purification.

The problem as we face it today is particularly defined by a relatively recent period in which Protestantism at least has become associated with cultural insensitivity. How far this phase is due to its identification with a bourgeois or Main Street ethos and how far it is due to some supposed inherent iconoclasm or asceticism is a question. The critics of Protestantism have inconsistently accused it of both anti-cultural obscurantism and of Promethean creativity or intoxicated individualism. In any case, late nineteenth century Protestantism has in wide areas exhibited a sorry aesthetic mediocrity, often, no doubt, as an aspect of the loss of religious vitality but not only so, and has forfeited the allegiance and sympathy of the best contemporary artists. It is true that many Christians of the period in question down to the present would have asserted their devotion to the arts and appealed to much artistic activity of the churches, but the kinds of artistic activity and taste so signaled would only have confirmed the lapse.

After some further preliminary observations on the present dilemma we propose to call attention to the fundamental issue in the relation of the Gospel to the aesthetic life, an issue which must never be lost sight of in any period. We can do this best by

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¹ *Prisoner For God*. New York, Macmillan, 1954, pp. 167 and 94.

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attention to the earliest church. With passing note of the Reformation we shall then center our discussion on the recent period, and especially on one striking fact. This fact is the widespread persistence in our society and in our church population of ideals of the beautiful which are associated with religion and which stem from a great tradition but which nevertheless by a paradox today further the breach between the Church and the artist.

I

When we speak of the cleavage between the Church and the arts we usually have in mind the whole modern period, and we contrast this period with the Middle Ages when the arts were the handmaidens of the Church. A recent attempt in Nottingham, England, to renew the local version of the medieval miracle plays which had lapsed for hundreds of years, succeeded only in highlighting the changed spirit of our modern secular culture. The relation of the ancient guild, craft or corporation to such Christian mysteries was something not reproducible today in the modern labor union, chamber of commerce, bar association, or even the local authors' club or drama league. Very likely, a more spontaneous and general response would have been secured from the twentieth century city of Nottingham if the Committee on Rites and Ceremonies had gone even further back and had resurrected a chariot race. As a matter of fact, the modern Olympic Games furnished a direct link with an age when religion and art were unified. Certainly the bullfight in Spain has still a significant, if indirect, relation to the ancient cult of Mithra in its deeper impact on the Iberian audience, as Henri de Montherlant has so strikingly brought out in his early novel, *Les Bestiaires*.

Evidently, one has to go far afield to identify today any really deep, organic relation between religion and art in a communal or civic sense; in a sense which would include the economic life as well as the strictly religious. Of course one finds something of this in Catholic civic ceremonies in Latin lands, as in non-Christian cultures. D. H. Lawrence tried to work out his dream of such a sacral order of life in his novel, *The Plumed Serpent*, but myth and ritual are not so easily extemporized, even on paper. We live in a world which calls for the separation of Church and state, despite various ceremonial survivals, and the separation of religion and the arts is of a piece with this truncated culture.

It may be urged that we should speak rather of the separation of Protestantism and the arts; yet Roman Catholics today are as much concerned with the problem as are Protestants. Catholic protests against the art objects of St. Sulpice (or, *la bondieuserie*) are as vehement as are protests among discerning Protestants against the religious chromos and "beauty-parlor" Christs which are so ubiquitous in our churches. The dilemma of Catholic art is reflected in the attitude of the modern Catholic saint, Léon Bloy, who as Wladimir Weidlé puts it, "reviling art, as it were stripped it off from his body like a sordid garment, to prostrate himself naked at

the foot of the cross."² But the more characteristic tendency of French Catholics is to call upon the modern artist to correct the artificiality and vacuity of the prevailing taste. And here we have the setting for the extensive controversy that has gone on over the Matisse chapel at Vence, the church at Azy, and other bold initiatives. Weidlé, himself a Catholic critic, laments what one meets with among believers on the Continent, "a perfect indifference to art, and among artists a crass ignorance with respect to the import of the Christian faith."³

The real problem, evidently, is that of the alienation of the artist and the creative writer from the Christian tradition as a whole. On the one hand their gifts have not been available to the Church in the service of the ecclesiastical arts. But more significant still, much of the really creative work of the modern age has not been inspired by or oriented to Christian presuppositions. It can be objected here that the artist, as artist, is not concerned with a religious confession one way or the other. But the fact remains that many of the most talented and influential artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have represented not only a detachment from, but often a clear disaffection with, the religious traditions of the West.

II

When we ask about the historical backgrounds to the tension between Christianity and the arts in any period we are led back to a fundamental theological issue. There is a basic anomaly in the relation of the Gospel to human culture in that it both condemns it and nourishes it. The Church both denies civilization and creates it. In the Scripture and in the early church the negative aspects appear with special prominence. As Tertullian wrote: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" The New Testament offers us familiar utterances bearing on this iconoclasm. There is Jesus' apparent dismissal of the magnificence of the Temple of Herod called to his attention by the disciples. The Greek word *kalos*, in the sense of beautiful, appears only once or twice on the lips of Jesus, most clearly with reference to a beautiful deed, that of the anointing at Bethany. Yet we know that Christ could recognize beauty in the lilies of the field. For him as for the prophets and psalmists the aesthetic order merged with the religious but was not absent. In his words we find the attribute of glory ascribed not only to heaven but to earth and indeed to the doomed city of Jerusalem, in the words:

Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.⁴

In the letters of Paul we find the same paradox. Just as the wisdom of man is folly with God, so the eloquence and the rhetoric of the world would empty the Gospel of its power. Christianity attacks life at so deep a level that it disallows all

² Wladimir Weidlé, *Les abeilles d'Aristée*. Paris, Gallimard, 1954, p. 322.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Matthew 5:34-35.

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existing culture, even Christian culture, and even the visible Church itself. How can one define a Christian aesthetic in these conditions? Yet here again we find a paradox. Just as Paul immediately checks himself and insists that the Gospel does represent a kind of wisdom, so he can affirm that it uses its own kind of words or language or rhetoric, taught by the Spirit. And he can write — using the current counters of pagan aesthetics —

Whatsoever is lovely, whatsoever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is any praise, think about these things.

It is always interesting to see how the true classicists deal with Paul. They must see him as a barbarian, yet they find phrases to credit him with some sort of eloquence. Nothing illustrates better the humanistic prejudice and parochialism or the inadequacy of classic aesthetic categories. H. J. C. Grierson has called St. Paul the next great romantic after Plato. This is a meaningless concession. There were no romantics until the end of the eighteenth century. Gilbert Murray could speak of him as "one of the great names in Greek literature." Willamowitz-Moellendorff is more illuminating. For him Paul is a "classic of Hellenism." Paul's faith created a new style when style had become manner. Paul's thinking comes direct from the heart,

spontaneously in a precipitate gushing stream. . . . At last someone speaks in Greek out of a fresh inward experience of life. . . . To him all literature is a bauble; he is without any artistic vein. All the greater is the estimate we must form of the artistic effects which he yet achieves.⁵

It is evident that Moellendorff begs the question as to what is "artistic", or at least uses this category in a very limited context. The work of Erich Auerbach in his *Mimesis* demonstrates the limitations of classical aesthetic and literary forms and canons, in the light precisely of the Hebraic and Hebraic-Christian "classics."

The fact is that Paul's letters reflect the double aspect of the rise of the Christian religion: on the one hand the eschatological judgment of the world and its forms and structures, especially of the ancient world and its view of man and culture; and on the other hand the deeper ground of what we can call the order of creation or general revelation. Any sharing by Christians in aesthetic discussion must take account of both these primordial aspects.

The relation of the Gospel to art is illuminated further by the attitudes of the Church in the early centuries. The early Christians, as it were, "fasted from art" as commonly understood. So Weidlé can say that early Christian art was in fact no art at all. It was a "mortification of art." The wall paintings of the catacombs were signs rather than symbols. Yet as George Florovsky points out, these in-artistic signs were yet real symbols if seen in a scriptural context. Again it is a question of whether we use the term "art" in a narrow, canonical sense or not.

⁵Willamowitz-Moellendorff. *Die griechische und lateinische Literatur und Sprache*. Berlin, Teubner, 1905, p. 159.

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The early Church Fathers⁶ represent a similar abstinence from secular literary practise. Irenaeus writes:

You will not look for the art of words among us who live among the Celts and speak mainly the barbarian languages. We have not learned it; nor the power of representation; we have not practised it.⁷

Origen explains that "if the disciples had used the arts of Greek rhetoric, it would have appeared as if Jesus were the founder of a new philosophy." What is most interesting in the case of Origen is that like some other Fathers he hesitated about writing at all. He notes the superiority of oral instruction, face to face with his pupils and congregations. The Gospel of the Word of God is properly spoken to the ear and not written for the eye. Yet he justifies the need of writing, if done with pure motives, for the purpose of wider persuasion. The Church Fathers, says Franz Overbeck, are "writers who do not want to be such." Augustine formally defended the role of a Christian *rhetor* and argued that the writers of Scripture had combined wisdom and skill in the loftiest measure.

If we were to continue our historical review we would find ample reason to justify the creative contribution of Christianity to the arts — despite the aforementioned paradox — and not least in the outcomes of the Reformation. It is no doubt true that English Calvinism and dissent represented in some phases a return to the early Christian "fasting from art," stressed the hearing of the ear and not the seeing of the eye, were suspicious of the senses, and coveted the immediacy of the relation of the soul to God apart from dependence upon symbol and image. There were reasons for such spiritual asceticism as there were in the conditions of the early church. Our attention should be given not only to the temporary mortification and impoverishment but to the ultimate outcome in a new mold of mankind endowed with aesthetic as well as other forms of human creativity.

A Catholic critic dealing recently with the metaphysical poets has maintained that "English religious poetry suffered a mortal blow when Protestant theology rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, denied the 'real presence,' and allegedly cut off the created world so that it could no longer be a valid bearer of the divine meaning."⁸ This meant, as he sees it, the collapse of that "firmament of symbol" which hitherto had sustained our western culture. But while the Christian will see this culture as requiring in some genuine sense the doctrine of the incarnation, the same is by no means true of the special dogma of transubstantiation. The Catholic

⁶ Our references to the Church Fathers are based on the article by Lukas Fischer, "Die Rechtfertigung der Schriftstellerei in der alten Kirche," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 12 (Mai-Juni, 1956) pp. 320-336.

⁷ *Adv. haer.*, I. praef. 3.

⁸ M. M. Ross, *Poetry and Dogma*. New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1954; one theme of the book as phrased by John E. Smith in "Poetry, Religion and Theology," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. IX, no. 2 (December 1955), pp. 263-4. See this article for discriminating discussion of the attitude of the Puritans to the senses.

insists on the concreteness of a supernatural order of sacrament and symbol, an objective and therefore essentially static world of mediating imagery. A Protestant understanding of grace and nature foregoes such an impressive fixed "firmament of symbol," but it retains the advantages — with all the risks — of the immediate Word, free to engage itself without trammels in all the actualities of the world's life. It is this contrast which lies behind the plea of a border-line Catholic like Péguy for the "disguises of grace," or of another border-line Catholic, Jean Cocteau, for what he calls "*le mystère laïc*." The gulf between much modern Catholicism and the arts⁹ has this static factor in the background, just as in the case of much Protestantism a literalistic biblicism or a propositional dogmatism severs the tie between the Gospel and the world.

III

We turn in conclusion to the divorce between Christianity and the arts in our own setting. We have spoken of the aesthetic insensitivity and Philistinism that has characterized much of our recent Protestantism, and have suggested that this might have its general social causes. That the older Puritanism in this country was capable of aesthetic achievement is evident in the architecture of the New England meeting house. That the Great Awakening and the evangelical movement had similar potentialities is evident in one of its fountainheads, Jonathan Edwards, and especially in his hitherto largely unpublished *Miscellanies*, as well as in the Negro Spirituals. One may also look upon the transcendentalist movement and the great writers associated with it as well as the well beloved "household poets" of the nineteenth century as evidences of the artistic fruitfulness of American nonconformity, of the "root and fatness of the olive tree" planted in the new world.

One can, indeed, point to a Christian romantic or idealist tradition in both England and America which runs through the Victorian age down through the "Georgian" poets to our own day. There would seem to be no breach between Christianity and art in this stream, which would include painters like the pre-Raphaelites and poets like Browning, Masfield and Vachel Lindsay. It is this tradition which unconsciously dominates the attitudes of hosts of men and women today, particularly in the churches, so far as an aesthetic tradition survives. It represents a religious and cultural outlook which has had glorious antecedents and which still has a vital substance for those yet undisturbed by the acids of modernity.

But this entente between Christianity and the arts is today deeply compromised. So far as theology is concerned, this Christian version of romantic idealism shares in the discounting that has overtaken philosophical idealism generally. Browning, like Ruskin, Charles Kingsley, and others in England, or Longfellow and Whitier in this country, represented a very real bridge between Christianity and art, not only for his own age but for many ever since. He can still make that

⁹See P. R. Regamey, *L'Art sacré au XXe siècle*. Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1952.

claim. But the climate has radically changed. The new generations of our century cannot accept the axioms which he presupposed; or if they can they are not reached by the idiom in which he spoke. This is not to disparage the stature of Browning or of Dickens or of Tennyson. In fact the real attitude of many moderns to such writers is one of wistfulness rather than scorn. It is often said that the modern mood finds an insufficient sense of evil in the Christian Victorian writers, and, indeed, in the Romantic poets. This is not the whole story. Lionel Trilling has shown how unflinching a sense of the fatalities of life was possessed by Keats. It is true that we no longer share the confidence in progress held by the Victorians. But Browning's voice grows dim today, not only for these ideological reasons. It is rather a matter of, as we say, his sensibility. His experience of life, his formation, and his consequent idiom are too foreign to our world.

The Christian idealist tradition has become attenuated in our time, both because of this change in sensibility and because of the new tragic experiences of our century, and the two are no doubt related. We find many of the older Christian poets and artists wanting, both in theology and in aesthetics. If we turn back to the nineteenth century, we go to G. M. Hopkins rather than to Browning; to Dostoevsky rather than to Dickens; to Emily Dickinson rather than to the American household poets. We find aesthetic justification for this. But we also find a greater sense of reality, of things as they are, in the writers preferred. It is not only that they are more aware of evil, but their awareness of good likewise carries more authenticity for us.

It is such considerations as these which explain the weaker hold today of religious poets who were highly cherished only a generation or two ago. It is recognized now that the Catholic mysticism of Francis Thompson had side-slipped very far towards a secular aestheticism. The Platonic idealism of Robert Bridges was unable to digest enough of the raw ingredients of life to achieve greater artistic stature. Vachel Lindsay is dated as an apostle though not as a troubadour.

But there is a time lag here. The bulk of our church people have not yet found these things out. They live in the nineteenth century so far as aesthetic taste and habit go. Their ideas of beauty, art and worship are traditional, but traditional in a sense quite different from that of the great tradition. We have too often a middle-class sentimentalism and moralism which falls far short even of the great Victorians. And these attitudes and the religious art, hymns and architecture associated with them further the alienation of the true artist.

Resistance to the modern movements in the arts today comes especially from a public brought up in the romantic-idealist tradition. This resistance also unfortunately blocks the best contemporary efforts to purify religious art. This public appeals either to a Christian idealism, suggested by such figures as we have named or to a more general religious mysticism identified with "A.E.", Tagore, Santayana, the early Yeats or Khalil Gibran. For such readers there is no cleavage between

religion and the arts, because the Holy Spirit is identified with the Muse. It is true, the Holy Spirit and the Muse are not finally unrelated; but it is a question of which Muse! The Muse of these contemporary initiates is a diminishing echo of the nineteenth century romantic Muse, who had herself been rudely exiled and sequestered from the main business of the industrial age. Her domain had been increasingly confined to that of dreams, sentiments and aspirations. Beauty became a special precinct, rather than the transfiguration of the actual world itself. Unfortunately, also, the worst forms of religious art and poetry created in this tradition are to be found today in what is known as Sunday School art and in inspirational and didactic hymns and paintings.

D. H. Lawrence, writing of the hymns which he had known in Nottinghamshire, speaks of the "ghastly sentimentalism that came like a leprosy over religion." Lawrence was not hypercritical. He spoke his admiration for the Bristol hymn-book which he had used as a child, and of what he called healthy hymns. But he had an innate sense for the specious and the meretricious. The reality of Christian worship cannot be restored by injections of saccharine. Paul Claudel pillories this procedure: "If the salt hath lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?" "With sugar!" This would appear to be a widespread prescription. But this kind of religion and this kind of art represent a dead end. Christian inspirational and moralistic art strive to recapture the great afflatus which the Romantic movement and transcendentalism possessed at their height. It only succeeds, however, in voicing an echo of an echo. It is better to realize that religion and art are completely divorced than to insist on this kind of a marriage of the two; for the kind of art it favors is precisely what alienates the true artist from religion.

Any true bridge-building today between religion and the arts will require a deeper grasp of what religion is and what art is: a better theology and a better aesthetic. A better theology will not identify religion or Christianity with any and every fervid or didactic impulse, nor with any and every experience of Beauty or the Spirit. And a better aesthetic will not be satisfied with a view of the imagination which exiles it from the real world, from the World's Body, to use Ransom's phrase.

It has been possible for modern romantics to unite religion and art because they were both romantic. When religion and poetry become ivory tower activities — exiled from the business of the world — when religion is assigned to a shrine and poetry to a pedestal, they console themselves by becoming confederates. Shrine religion becomes aestheticism. Pedestal art takes on a pseudo-sanctity. But when religion and art are rebaptized in a total life experience they are first set apart according to their distinct roles and then may be drawn together in a valid interrelation and interpenetration. The first task therefore for those who would overcome the cleavage between Christianity and the arts is to dissociate Christianity from some forms of sentimental art which obscure the issue and which distort the faith itself.

Christian Discrimination in the Realm of Aesthetic Judgment

GEDDES MACGREGOR

Expression is the artist's *métier*. A poet is not called upon to teach religious doctrine any more than he is expected to impart ornithological instruction. Nor is he to be required to induce moral or immoral sentiments or to promote liberal or conservative conceptions of man's political aims. His work is to express in his chosen medium what is "in him." Nevertheless, if he is to inflict his poetry on me, he must not only express what is in him but communicate it to me. If his communication is successful, what I admire is the success of his expression. I do not necessarily admire what is in him. On the contrary, I may find this quite abominable. Suppose, for instance, that he has written a delightfully clever bit of blasphemy against my deepest religious convictions. I may award him (should it be in my power) first place in the Poetry Competition; I need not on that account invite him to tea, let alone to Holy Communion.

All this is, I think, plain enough. A poem is intended to stimulate poetic experience. Consider one such as Beatrice Mayor's *Evening over the Forest*:

Watch.

What is it you see?

The stark bough of an oak.

Beyond it the evening sky.

Clear, clear the evening sky

And green like a green pearl.

And so forth till the last stanza which is:

Come away.

Come away.

It is quite a pretty poem, and if I have any poetry in my soul I must surely respond to it. I enjoy it; I call for an encore; perhaps two or even three. But if it turns out that the encores are all of much the same order, my interest quickly palls. Why? My complaint is not at the poet's failure to express what is in her. She has expressed this with gaiety and charm; she has communicated it with vivacity and grace. But now that my interest has been aroused, I am hoping she will help me to express what is in me. In this I am (let us suppose) disappointed. I return home, where my friends, seeing my glumness, ask what was the matter with the performance: did not the poet succeed in expressing herself? Was she not able to give what was in her soul? And I reply that, on the contrary, she not only expressed herself most admirably; she exhausted herself in ten minutes. Not only did she give herself with the utmost generosity; she gave herself away; she was able to show me the

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depth of her experience in a quarter of an hour. Within that time I saw the uncarpeted floor of her mind and knew that however long I might wait she would have nothing to show me but her skill in rearranging her few pieces of very ordinary furniture. No doubt it is fun for her; but it does not help to solve my artistic problems. In plain English, I am bored.

Such dissatisfaction is inevitable if the poet lacks even, say, a sense of smell. Perhaps I do not notice what is wrong with his poetry; I feel only that it leaves me somehow unsatisfied. I like it, and because I like it I return to it over and over again. I read everything the poet writes as soon as it comes out, as if hoping that at last the sense of dissatisfaction will vanish. But it never does. At length I happen to learn that the poet lacks the olfactory sense. This explains everything, as far as my particular dissatisfaction is concerned. I see now why the poet could not but have failed to satisfy me entirely, even if he had had the genius of Milton, and I powers of appreciation to match his skill. He could not satisfy me because he had nothing, at this point, to satisfy me with. I may continue to rate him very highly. I may find him peculiarly interesting, as one is interested in what a really great poetic genius can do even when the genius is born blind. But I am none the less dissatisfied. Part of my experience is still unexpressed. I may be constrained to turn to other poets who, though inferior, do not suffer from his disability. I may even have to write poetry myself, preferring my own feeble genius to that of a nodding Homer.

It is therefore possible to distinguish two elements in literary and artistic criticism. First, I admire the success or deplore the failure of the artist to express his impressions; then I critically consider the value of the impressions he has to express. I do not necessarily blame him if these are weak or shallow or muddy or dull. I may think he has been badly brought up; but that is not his fault. Begin by purifying the source, enjoins François Mauriac, and those who drink the water will not get sick. The source of the poet's impressions is, in part, at any rate, his society and the education he has received. (Christians will protest that it is remarkable what Christ can do with the badly brought up; I should be the last to dispute it.) But the fact that I do not blame poets who play pretty games with words on the plausible pretext that they are expressing all they have to express and are doing it with distinction does nothing to mitigate the boredom engendered by the emptiness of their hearts and minds. I recall an undergraduate discussion I once heard on Modern Art and the Dignity of Man. The "protagonists" of "modern art" were apparently much concerned to deny that man has dignity. That is perhaps as one might have expected. But their adversaries seemed to be very eager to persuade them that they had made a mistake. They wanted to show the "protagonists" that these were insufficiently aware of their own dignity. It seemed to me that it was the adversaries who were misguided. The protagonists were not hiding anything from themselves. They were content with art that made no reference to human dignity, because they had no such human dignity to which any such

reference might have been made. What dignity has man when the *imago Dei* is destroyed or even badly defaced?

It is legitimate for the critic to consider both the poet's expressions and the poet's impressions, provided that he does not confuse the one with the other. There is however a further distinction to be noted. A work of art, be it Beethoven's *Fifth* or a lyric triviality, is intended to stimulate aesthetic experience. This is the purpose of the communication. It is the purpose of El Greco's *Agony in the Garden* and the like to do both this and something else. So we expect every educated atheist to appreciate El Greco; the profession of atheism would not exonerate him from the charge of being a barbarian if he indicated a preference for billboards advertising soap in jargon sufficiently complicated to be understood by the illiterate. ('Our facial detergent is Science's latest gift to U.') But we should no more expect him to appraise all that is in El Greco than we should expect even the most intelligent child to assess the artistic merit of a love story.

The purpose of Christian art must include the stimulation of aesthetic experience; but it also includes the initiation of a trend of experience leading Christians towards union with Christ. So it is that a Christian as such, though he values El Greco, does not really value him so very much more than he does works of a similar kind but of much less artistic merit. For the Christian as such is looking not for aesthetic experience *simpliciter*, but for God, the *terminus ad quem* of that movement of which the aesthetic "moment" is the *terminus a quo*. A rude crucifix fashioned by a believing peasant of no artistic ability is likely to be just as efficient for my dying hands to grip and my dying eyes to look upon as one fashioned by a Cellini. On the other hand, while the atheist's aesthetic activity would hardly be aroused at all by the rude crucifix, the Christian's aesthetic activity is inevitably aroused, for as Collingwood has said, "worship is, naturally, at bottom an exercise of the aesthetic consciousness. All acts of worship, whether they take the form of singing, dancing, speech, or the like, are first and foremost aesthetic acts. . . . But worship is no more mere art than holiness is mere beauty."¹ Corporate worship, as I have myself said elsewhere, "is always art, not merely in the sense in which prayer must always be literature, but art of a special kind. Like Wagnerian opera, it is a *Gesamtkunstwerk*; but it is one in which there are no spectators or audience, for it is *leitourgia*. But it can never be merely art of any kind; for it must stimulate experience much further in a certain direction than it would ever be the business of art to do. If Wagner stimulated anything other than aesthetic experience, it would be in order to elicit, indirectly, aesthetic experience in greater splendour. Solemn worship never has as its aim the emergence of such aesthetic activity; but if it succeeds in its own purpose, this inevitably happens also."²

¹ R. G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*. London, Oxford University Press, 1924, p. 121.

² *Aesthetic Experience in Religion*. New York, Macmillan, 1947, p. 213.

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Granted that the Christian is entitled to apply special canons of criticism to Christian art and that it would be grossly unfair to judge other works of art by such canons, it remains to be considered in what such Christian criticism may consist. One of the most obvious tests to be applied, it would seem, is that of theological accuracy. By this standard, 'Yield not to temptation' is certainly to be preferred to the last stanza of 'Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear,' which invites Christ to watch over us in this life till we achieve annihilation in a Buddhist *nirvana*:

Till in the ocean of Thy love
We lose ourselves in heaven above.

This is a familiar example of the nonsense-utterances to be found scattered throughout our hymnals. It is accounted nonsense because it does not fit the other parts of the service. The reader at the lectern has, let us suppose, read God's Word to the people, and the preacher has from the pulpit proclaimed the nature of the Christian hope, concluding, it may be, with a careful delineation of the beatific vision in which the beatified retain their personal identity. He has also, perhaps, even contrasted the nature of the Christian hope with that of the Hinayana Buddhist prospect; whereupon the assembled multitudes arise and with one mighty voice implore their Risen Lord to bless them while they wake ere through the world their way they take to the Buddhist ocean of forgetfulness. In all this I am assuming, the careful reader will have already noted, that the nonsense will be fairly obvious, since confined to hymnody and so in sharp contrast to the rest of the service. I do not, however, ignore the case, by no means unusual, in which the absurdity of the stanza is difficult to detect, since the rest of the service is so full of nonsense that only a theologian of the greatest skill could possibly be expected to disentangle its various absurdities.

Hymnody is, of course, a very special kind of Christian art as every experienced pastor but not one out of five choirmasters and organists knows. It is therefore to be judged by additional canons; *besides* not setting forth theological nonsense, a hymn must fulfil certain other conditions which are of almost no importance in a Christian poem, while on the other hand certain excellences that would much enrich a Christian poem would be wasted on a hymn. So it is that 'O worship the King' is a better hymn than 'The Hound of Heaven' ever could be. In this the case of Christian art is not peculiar. A stage-designer is not necessarily a good painter of miniatures any more than a good lawn mower is likely to be the most efficient sort of hair-clippers.

Christian poetry must be severely judged, because there is so much in it to judge. Much of it, for instance, while expressing the delicacy of certain aspects of Christian experience, lacks the robustness that we would express in describing a genuine encounter with God. Chesterton is one of the few writers of Christian poetry to capture this quality, as he does, for example, in his "Ballade d'une grande dame," who is to be forgiven by God for all her little vices,

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But for the Virtuous Things you do,
The Righteous Work, the Public Care,
It shall not be forgiven you.

This is excellent Christian poetry, because it expresses with immaculate skill what it would take the average Christian clergyman or theological professor six Lectures on Christian Doctrine to do, in the course of which he would probably succeed in being as dull and therefore as un-Christian as the members of the Ethical Culture Society against whose tenets he would be implicitly lecturing.

Here is a satirical poem of Chesterton's which seems to me to be Christian poetry *par excellence*. It was written to express his indignation when Lord Birkenhead, then Mr. F. E. Smith and the most brilliant and eloquent of the rising politicians of his day, had publicly referred to the Bill that had been introduced in Parliament to disestablish the Church of Wales (the continued establishment of which was anachronistic), in these unctuous words: "It is a bill which has shocked the conscience of every Christian community in Europe."

Are they clinging to their crosses,
F. E. Smith,
Where the Breton boat-fleet tosses,
Are they, Smith?
Do they, fasting, tramping, bleeding,
Wait the news from this our city?
Groaning 'That's the Second Reading!'
Hissing 'There is still Committee!'
If the voice of Cecil falters,
If McKenna's point has pith,
Do they tremble for their altars?
Do they, Smith?

Russian peasants round their pope
Huddled, Smith,
Hear about it all, I hope,
Don't they, Smith?
In the mountain hamlets clothing
Peaks beyond Caucasian pales,
Where Establishment means nothing
And they never heard of Wales,
Do they read it all in Hansard
With a crib to read it with—
'Welsh Tithes: Dr. Clifford Answered.'
Really, Smith?

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In the lands where Christians were,
F. E. Smith,
In the little lands laid bare,
Smith, O Smith!
Where the Turkish bands are busy,
And the Tory name is blessed
Since they hailed the Cross of Dizzy
On the banners from the West!
Men don't think it half so hard if
Islam burns their kin and kith,
Since a curate lives in Cardiff
Saved by Smith.

It would greatly, I must own,
Soothe me, Smith,
If you left this theme alone,
Holy Smith!
For your legal cause or civil
You fight well and get your fee;
For your God or dream or devil
You will answer, not to me.
Talk about the pews and steeples
And the Cash that goes therewith!
But the souls of Christian peoples. . . .
—Chuck it, Smith!

If our innumerable Christian journals, periodicals, tractates, tracts, magazines, brochures, bulletins, *feuilletons*, pamphlets and other such publications were performing anything like as useful a function as is occasionally pretended, they would be crammed full of such features and vying with each other in artistic excellence. Their cartoons would make the *New Yorker* look old hat to every Christian who had got as far as the confirmation class. And perhaps the corporate worship of such Christians could hardly but be good enough to make us want to see Chesterton's "Hymn for the Church Militant" ("Great God, that bowest sky and star") in all good hymnals, whereas as things are we are more likely to be engaged in silent prayer that its existence may be kept dark to those who are quite capable of "discovering" it and using it as a soprano *solo molto con espressione idiota* in what I have elsewhere called Orthodox-Pretend Christianity.³

The dreadful joy Thy Son has sent
Is heavier than any care;
We find, as Cain his punishment,
Our pardon more than we can bear.

³From a *Christian Ghetto*. London, Longmans. 1954, chapter XIV.

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In appraising a literary work of art that purports to express Christian experience, though I *distinguish* expression from impression, I cannot really *separate* them. They are as inseparable as are soul and body in an Aristotelian doctrine of man. Only in theory can I pretend to make two distinct judgments, saying that the expression is good but the Christian experience apparently thin. For it is a judgment against the artist as much as against the Christian. An artist has no responsibility, it is true, to depict what is edifying or instructive or politically sound or theologically orthodox. It is not to be held against him that he chooses to paint drunks when he might paint deacons, or write about harlots when he might be writing about missionaries. Nor are we to find fault with him for painting the arrival of the morning's milk when he might have painted the Annunciation, or writing poems about mosques and muezzins and minarets when he might have been writing poetry like this:

And we will walk the weeded field,
And tell the golden harvest's yield,
The corn that makes the holy bread
By which the soul of man is fed,
The holy bread, the food unpriced,
The everlasting mercy, Christ.

But if the artist *does* have the temerity to choose Christian themes for his essays in expression, he must not complain if he finds himself subjected to sharper criticism by competent critics than that to which he would be exposing himself if he wrote poems about his own undoubted sensations in the company of an ice cream soda. To decide whether or not to go to the movies tonight is as much a moral choice as it is to decide to accept or reject eternal life; but this is not to say that the former is as important a decision as is the latter. Scribbling about daffodils and beer gardens is as much literature as is writing essays on the eucharist or epics on the *kenosis*; but it is not as important, though it is often otherwise better, literature. Contrariwise, making a mess of a poem about potatoes is not so conspicuous as making a mess of a poem about the procession and mission of the Trinity. Naturally, however, one is more likely to find excellent poems about the former than even passable ones about the latter. As a matter of fact, the best poem on the Trinity that I know, the *Quicumque vult*, appointed in the Anglican liturgy to be read at Morning Prayer upon thirteen Feasts, has been widely abandoned altogether in most churches to provide the clergy with more ample opportunities for inept pulpit disquisitions on current affairs, or even, worse still, their own efforts to make the doctrine of the Trinity more congenial to the taste of those who account theological illiteracy the eighth cardinal virtue.

To the question, sometimes asked, 'Is it possible to criticise Christian art theologically?' I would reply that it is possible but not always desirable. Christian art 'holds' theology; if the theology is to be criticised, the best way to conduct the criticism is, I think, to criticise the art from the standpoint of Christian exper-

ience, including, of course, history. This will be the most effective criticism of the theology. As a matter of fact, it is not only Christians, or Zen Buddhists, or other people claiming to have certain religious convictions, who criticise art with reference to such convictions. Nihilists and positivists, if they have the courage of their lack of religious convictions, inevitably adopt a similar procedure when they engage in literary or artistic criticism. So it is quite proper for one nihilist criticising the poetry of another to say, encouragingly, "This almost succeeds: with a more strenuous effort to discard the ugly remnants of Christian superstition, the artist will probably produce first-rate work." There is no reason why Christian critics should not make similar judgments, *mutatis mutandis*.

Certain kinds of Christian criticism demand extraordinary learning. For instance, few would care to attempt to consider whether Gelasian collects were to be preferred, in general, to Gallican ones, for the answer would demand not only a profound familiarity with the sacramentaries but a very extensive knowledge of Christian history and much else besides. On the other hand, to show why either was to be preferred to something excogitated by a lapsed Unitarian demonstrating at a Quaker meeting the efficacy of his mental protection against the inner light, is an exercise in Christian literacy criticism that might be undertaken by any catechumen with a decent general education that included the elements of prosody and even only a snap course in the history of Christian thought.

The Collaboration of Vision in the Poetic Act

Its Establishment of the Religious Dimension

NATHAN A. SCOTT, JR.

Rhythm and ideation, song and vision, collaborate in the poetic act . . .

—Philip Wheelwright

Vision is perhaps the poet's morality.

—Wallace Fowlie

We are gathered here in these morning sessions of the Institute to reflect upon what are considered to be some of the major "peripheries of literature," and it is my task to suggest a perspective upon the religious periphery of literary art. I feel it, of course, to be a considerable honor to have been asked to come out of the theological community in which I hold my academic residence to appear before so distinguished a group of literary scholars as the English Institute has for many years been. And, this being the case, I cannot but also feel it to be something of an impropriety for me to begin my remarks, as I must, by suggesting that the inclusion of my topic under our larger subject represents what is, I fear, a misconstruction of fundamental issues. But this, nevertheless, is the point at which I should like to begin, and what I want, indeed, to propose is that the notion that the issues of religion are peripheral to the main issues that face the student of literature is itself a notion that reflects a situation of crisis in contemporary criticism. The crisis that I have in mind is one that arises out of what is central and decisive in the doctrines of modern poetics, and it is a crisis that was given a kind of desperate announcement a few years ago when Allen Tate bluntly raised the question which it is a peculiarity of our generation to be anxious about — namely, "is literary criticism possible?"¹

It would not, of course, at first appear that the man of letters in our time feels himself to be at such an extremity, for one of the patron saints of the modern movement has assured us that the contemporary critic is "among the most presentable instances of modern man" and that in depth and precision his work is "beyond

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¹ The reference is Mr. Tate's essay "Is Literary Criticism Possible?" which appears in his book, *The Forlorn Demon*. Chicago, Regnery, 1953.

all earlier criticism in our language." And on all sides today we are frequently given similar testimonies of how unparalleled in any previous age are the vigor and trenchancy of criticism in our own time. So, with a zeal that is itself certainly unparalleled in any previous time, the contemporary achievement is anthologized almost annually; and the editors of the journals in which it has gained expression frequently engage their colleagues in symposia, the aim of which is to indicate the gains that have been made and the solid ground on which we may now take our stand. But in all this stocktaking I think we may sense a certain anxious uncertainty as to whether anything has been achieved at all and as to whether, in the presence of the great works of the past and of the modern period, we are yet able really to penetrate the ontological intransigence of the aesthetic fact. And it is just possible that, despite the actual impressiveness of the achievement of modern criticism, this anxiety is a consequence of the doctrine which it has promoted and which has had the ironical effect of calling into question the very possibility of criticism itself. Indeed, what I want to propose is that, if we will take thought again of the first principles by which we have undertaken in our time to reckon with the reality of literary art, we may be put in mind not only of what in part our present distresses in criticism derive from but also of what is problematic in our understanding of the religious dimensions of imaginative literature.

Now when we seek for the principal motives that underlie the general movement of criticism in our period, we cannot for long escape the recognition that, among them at least, has been the intention of many of its most distinguished representatives to offer some resistance to the reductionist tendency of modern scientism, particularly when it broaches upon those transactions with reality that are peculiar to the humanistic imagination. I can think of no single doctrine or emphasis that is subscribed to by all those writers who at one time or another have been held accountable for "the new criticism," but certainly by far a greater number of them are of a single mind in their apprehensiveness about the deeper cultural implications of the reigning positivism than they are on any other single point. And it has been their unwillingness to give their suffrage to the absolute hegemony of empirical science which has been a decisive influence upon their approach to the fundamental issues in theory of literature. Ours has, of course, been a time in which it has been generally supposed that the only responsible versions of experience that can be had are those afforded us by the empirical sciences and in which, therefore, the common impulse has been to trivialize the arts by regarding them, in Arthur Mizener's phrase, as a kind of "amiable insanity" which, at best, is to be tolerated for the sedative effect that it has upon the nervous system. But even this assignment hardly constitutes a satisfactory charter for the artist, since, in the ministry of health to the nervous system, he is not likely to compete successfully with our modern doctors of psychology. So, in the last analysis, our culture has been incapable of finding for the arts, and especially for literature, a valuable or an irreplaceable function. And the result has been that the major strategists of modern criticism have felt it incumbent upon themselves to revindicate the poetic enterprise

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by doing what the culture was unable to do — namely, by seeking to define that unique and indispensable role in the human economy that is played by imaginative literature and that can be pre-empted by nothing else.

This contemporary effort to specify the nature of the autonomy which a work of literary art possesses has, of course, involved a careful analysis of what is special in the linguistic strategies of the poet. And the aim has been to establish that poetry is poetry and not another thing, for it has been recognized that in a culture as dominated by scientific procedure as is our own the common tendency is to hold all forms of discourse accountable to those critical canons that are really appropriate only to scientific modes of discourse — which, of course, then makes it possible for non-scientific modes of statement to be quickly dismissed on one pretext or another. So the tack that the contemporary movement in criticism has taken has been one that involves the denial that the poet is any sort of expositor at all. He is, we have been told, not an expositor, not a Platonist, not an allegorist, not a merchant in the business of ideas: on the contrary, he is a certain kind of technician, a certain kind of maker, who constructs out of language special sorts of things, such things as we call dramas and novels and poems. And, as the doctrine runs, what is distinctive about the language of imaginative literature is that, in contrast to the ordinary forms of expository discourse, it does not involve the reduction of words to the level of being merely conceptual signs. That is to say, it does not lead us beyond itself into some external realm of meaning; it is, rather, a language that is so thoroughly composed and that is so heavily charged with imaginative intensity that, unlike other forms of discourse, it is capable of capturing attention *intransitively* upon itself.² It is, indeed, the one form of discourse that, in its operations, manages to avoid any bifurcation between the thing or event and the words which refer to it. The language of poetry does not convey any rhetorical propositions about the issues of religion or politics or psychology or science; that is to say, it does not conduct the mind beyond itself to anything at all but rather leads us deeper and deeper into itself, in a process of exploration.

Our immunity from any compulsion to relate the language of the poem to an external reality has, in recent criticism, been understood in terms of the organic character of poetic structure. Which is to say that the contemporary critic has come to see poetic meaning not as a function of the relationships between the terms of the poem and some reality which is extrinsic to them but rather as a function of the interrelationships that knit the terms together into the total pattern that forms the unity of the work. Our way of stating this distinctive character of poetic language is to say that its terms function not ostensibly but reflexively, not semantically but

² Vide Eliseo Vivas, "A Definition of the Aesthetic Experience," in *The Problems of Aesthetics*, ed. Eliseo Vivas and Murray Krieger. New York, Rinehart & Co., 1953, pp. 406-411. It is to Mr. Vivas that we are indebted for the definition in contemporary aesthetics of the poetic experience in terms of "intransitive attention." This concept receives further elaboration in his book, *Creation and Discovery*. New York, Noonday Press, 1955.

syntactically — by which we mean that, unlike the situation that obtains in logical discourse in which the terms “retain their distinctive characters despite the relationship into which they have been brought,”³ in poetic discourse they lose their distinctive characters, as they fuse into one another and are modified by what Mr. Cleanth Brooks calls “the pressure of the context.”⁴ It is, indeed, this whole phenomenon to which Mr. Brooks has appropriately applied the term *irony*, a concept that he has insisted upon by way of emphatically remarking the radical extent to which the terms and “statements” of a literary work bear the pressure of the total context and have their meanings modified by that context. And it will be remembered that in a brilliant passage in *The Well Wrought Urn* he suggests that they ought even to be read as if they were speeches in a drama, since, as he says, if they are to be justified at all, it will not be by virtue of their “scientific or historical or philosophical truth, but [they will, rather, be] justified in terms of a principle analogous to that of dramatic property.”⁵

Now it is in terms of this organic character of poetic structure that our generation has come to understand the resistance of literary art to the discursive paraphrase. It does not yield a series of paraphrasable abstractions because no set of terms of which a poetic work is constituted refers to anything extrinsic to the work: they refer, rather, to the other terms to which they are related within the work. And thus the perception of the meaning of the work awaits not an act of comparison between the component terms and the external objects or events which they may be taken to symbolize but awaits, rather, an act of imaginative prehension that will focus upon “the entire pattern of internal reference . . . apprehended as a unity.”⁶ The coherence of a work of imaginative literature is to be sought, in other words, not in any set of logically manageable propositions into which it may be paraphrased but rather in the living pattern of interrelated themes and “resolved stresses”⁷ that the work contains.

There is, however, one inescapable fact that such a formulation of poetic meaning may at first appear to neglect, and it is the incorrigibly referential thrust that words do have. They like to function “ostensively”: that is to say, they insist upon pointing to things: it makes no difference whether the things are actual or ideal: what counts is that they are extrinsic to the words themselves, for the words are not happy unless they are performing a semantic function. And, this being their

³ Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. by Susanne K. Langer. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1946, p. 91.

⁴ Cleanth Brooks, “Irony as a Principle of Structure,” *Literary Opinion in America*, ed. by Morton Dauwen Zabel. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1951, pp. 730-731.

⁵ Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*. London, Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1949, p. 188.

⁶ Joseph Frank, “Spatial Form in Modern Literature,” *Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment*, ed. by Mark Schorer et al. New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948, p. 383. Mr. Frank’s essay contains some very acute observations upon the “reflexive” character of poetic language.

⁷ Cleanth Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

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habit, it would seem that they would be intractable by the poetic purpose. But this problem is recognized by contemporary theorists who, indeed, have come to regard the poetic labor as involving in part an effort to deliver the word from its ordinary logical bonds and its inherent mediateness. As Ezra Pound once remarked, the poet "takes words ordinarily having conventional objective meanings, and by forcing them into a new and independent structure objectifies fresh meanings. . . . The function of the artist," he said, "is precisely the formulation of what has not found its way into language, i.e. any language, verbal, plastic or musical."⁸ And it is precisely this effort of the poet to perform not simply an act of denotation but the far more difficult act of evocation, of capturing and conveying the full, living body of the world and of objectifying fresh experience of it — it is precisely this effort that very often commits him to the daring project of liberating words from the logical form into which they conventionally fall, so that they may be free to enter into the characteristic structures of poetic form in which they are affected by, and in turn affect, the total context established by the work. This is why you do not discover the meaning of a poem by taking an inventory of the various terms of which it is constituted and then by adding up the various meanings which these terms have in conventional usage. And when contemporary criticism insists upon the foolishness of such a procedure, it does so because it is sensitive, perhaps above all else, to the marvellous violence of the action that is performed upon terms once they are drawn up into the poetic process, so that each alters under the aspect of the other and enters relationships that are completely irreducible to logical form and gathers a quite new meaning from the role that it assumes to the total configuration. It is the mystery that T. S. Eliot had in mind when he remarked upon "that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combination," which takes place in poetry.

So we may say, then, by way of summary, that the redefinition in our time of the nature of literary art has led to the view that the given work exists in and through its language. What we have immediately before us is a patterned mosaic in language which is, in the phrase by which Denis de Rougemont speaks of the work of art in general, "a calculated trap for mediation"⁹ — and as such it effectively insists that before it we perform an act of rapt and "intransitive attention." One might even say that for the modern sensibility the poetry in the poem resides "not [in] some intrinsic quality (beauty or truth) of the materials"¹⁰ with which the poet builds his poem but resides rather in the completeness of the unity

⁸ Ezra Pound, "Epstein, Belgian and Meaning," *The Criterion*, Vol. IX, No. XXXVI (April, 1930), p. 471.

⁹ Denis de Rougemont "Religion and the Mission of the Artist," *Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature*, ed. Stanley R. Hopper. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1952, p. 177.

¹⁰ Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1939, p. 43.

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or "composition" that he contrives out of stuff of language. What we begin with, as Eliot has told us, is simply "excellent words in excellent arrangement."¹¹

Now this redefinition in modern criticism of "the mode of existence of a literary work of art" has in turn led to a redefinition of the creative process. For so rigorous has been the stress that has been put upon the autonomy of poetic language that language itself has often very nearly been regarded as the enabling cause of literary art. It is assumed that art is a virtue of the practical intellect and that the poet's vision is not fully formed until it has been objectified in language. Indeed, the executive principle of the creative process is considered really to derive not from the poet's metaphysic or his special perspective upon the human story but rather from the medium to which his vision is submitted and by which it is controlled. It is regarded as a truism that whatever it is that the poet "says" about reality in a given work is something the content of which he was not himself in possession of until the completion of the work. For, as Murray Krieger has recently put it, "the poet's original idea for his work, no matter how clearly thought out and complete he thinks it is, undergoes such radical transformations as language goes creatively to work upon it that the finished poem, in its full internal relations, is far removed from what the author thought he had when he began."¹² The medium alone, in other words, objectifies the poet's materials and gives them their implications. This axiom of the contemporary movement in criticism is expressed with especial directness by R. P. Blackmur, when he remarks in his essay on Melville:

Words, and their intimate arrangements, must be the ultimate as well as the immediate source of every effect in the written or spoken arts. Words bring meaning to birth and themselves contained the meaning as an imminent possibility before the pangs of junction. To the individual artist the use of words is an adventure in discovery; the imagination is heuristic among the words it manipulates. The reality you labour desperately or luckily to put into your words . . . you will actually have found there, deeply ready and innately formed to give an objective being and specific idiom to what you knew and did not know that you knew.¹³

Whatever it is, in other words, that is in the completed work is there by virtue of the language which controls the creative process and which produces the "new word" that Yvor Winters declares the authentic work of literary art to be. The poet does not have a version of the human situation to express, some imperious preoccupation to voice, or some difficult report to make: no, he has none of this: indeed, as Eliot tells us, there is no good reason for supposing that he does "any thinking on his own" at all, for it is not his business to think — not even

¹¹ T. S. Eliot, "Preface to the 1928 Edition," *The Sacred Wood*. London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1934, 4th ed., pp. ix-x.

¹² Murray Krieger, *The New Apologists for Poetry*. Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 1956, p. 23.

¹³ R. P. Blackmur, "The Craft of Herman Melville: A Putative Statement," *The Lion and the Honeycomb*. New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955, p. 138.

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poets as great as Dante and Shakespeare. No, all the writer need have is his medium, and, if he knows how to trust it and how to submit to it, it will do his work for him; it will, as Mr. Blackmur says, bring the "meaning to birth."

Now, to be sure, what I have offered thus far is patently an abridgment of the advanced poetics of our time, but perhaps this account is at least sufficiently complex to provide some indication of the sources of the crisis that I earlier remarked as having arisen in contemporary criticism. It is clear certainly that we are being asked by many of the most distinguished theorists of our day to regard the work of literary art as a linguistic artifact that exists in complete detachment from any other independently existent reality. The fully achieved work of art, as the argument runs, is a discrete and closed system of mutually interrelated terms: the organic character of the structure prevents the constituent terms from being atomistically wrenched out of their context and made to perform a simple referential function, and it also succeeds in so segregating the total structure from the circumambient world as to prevent its entering into any extramural affiliation. "A poem should not mean but be," say MacLeish, and thereby, in this famous line from his poem "Ars Poetica," he summarizes, with a beautiful coinCISION, the mind of a generation.

But then, of course, if the work of literary art exists in complete isolation from all those contexts that lie beyond the one established by the work itself, if it neither points outward toward the world nor inward toward the poet's subjectivity, if it is wholly self-contained and cut off from the general world of meaning, why, then it would seem that nothing really can be said about it at all. And in this unpromising strait are we not all chargeable with "the heresy of paraphrase"? Mark Van Doren suggests in his book *The Noble Voice* that "Any great poet is in a sense beyond criticism for the simple reason that he has written a successful story," that "Criticism is most at home with failure," and that in the presence of the great success it must be "as dumb as the least instructed reader."¹⁴ This is, of course, hardly an inspiring conclusion for the practicing critic to reach; yet it is, in a way, the conclusion that has been enforced upon him by the new poetics of our period. For the curious irony that has arisen out of the contemporary movement in criticism is a result of the fact that, on the one hand, it has striven for a concept of literary art that would permit responsible discussion of it as art rather than as something else but, on the other hand, it has succeeded in so completely segregating art from everything else that, in its presence, it has condemned itself, at least in principle, to silence. And this is, I believe, the reason for the noticeable anxiety in the critical forums today about whether anything has really been achieved at all. Much has been achieved, of course, in the establishment of a fund of substantiated judgments about literary texts, but the point is that this achievement has had no sanction in the body of principle to which our generation has come to subscribe, for that body of doctrine has tended ultimately to represent the aesthetic fact as

¹⁴ Mark Van Doren, *The Noble Voice*. New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1946, pp. 181-182.

unavailable for critical discussion. And thus it should perhaps, after all, not be surprising that the same distinguished critic who some years ago told us that the contemporary achievement surpassed "all earlier criticism in our language" is, in a more recent essay, to be found wondering why it is that critics don't go mad; and one of his equally distinguished friends often ruminates upon the "burden" that he and his colleagues in criticism today must bear.

The distresses and distempers that lead our most sensitive practical critics today to reflect upon the inhumanly difficult nature of their labors are, in other words, a result of their betrayal by the inadequate concept of literature that has descended to them from the main strategists in modern theory. There are many points at which this concept might now be put under some pressure, but I want to focus on the understanding of the creative process that has been promoted in our time, for here, I think, we may get as good a purchase as any other upon our present dilemmas. And when this aspect of modern theory is examined it becomes evident to how great a degree its legislation about the nature of the poetic object has determined its understanding of the process by which that object is made. What it has wanted to insist upon is the indissoluble unity of form and content in the work which gives it the kind of autonomy that prevents its being translated into any other mode of statement. And this concern has in turn led contemporary theorists to minimize the controlling effect upon the creative process of the writer's ideas and beliefs. For it has been supposed that were any great tribute to be paid to these factors we should be quickly on the way towards reinstating the heresy of didacticism, with its notion that the literary work is merely a rhetorical communication of independently formulable ideas. So great stress has been put upon the directive role of the medium in the creative process, and we have been reminded of how radical must be the transformations of the poet's ideas, once these ideas undergo the modifications necessitated by the exigencies of a developing linguistic structure. What we are asked to understand is that nothing really exists in imaginative literature, except as it is organized by the medium which is language. Indeed, whatever does exist is itself created by the language, for as I. A. Richards says, it is the "means of that growth which is the mind's endless endeavour to order itself"¹⁵ — or, as Blackmur put it in the passage which was quoted earlier, "Words bring meaning to birth and themselves contained the meaning as an imminent possibility before the pangs of junction." The medium, in other words, is a kind of intelligent agency which in some mysterious way puppetizes the poet and does the job for which, in its innocence, common-sense has traditionally held him responsible.

I am aware, of course, that at this point I am to some extent exaggerating the contemporary testimony, but its own exaggerations in this matter are, I think, sufficiently great to make my characterization intelligible. In any event I am

¹⁵ I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1936, p. 131.

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reassured by the coincidence that I discover between my own reaction and that of the English critic, D. S. Savage, who suggests in the Preface to his book, *The Withered Branch*, that this "dizzy elevation" of the medium in contemporary criticism clearly leaves something important out of account.¹⁶ And there is, I believe, no finer recent statement of what is unaccounted for than that which Jacques Maritain gives us in his great book, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*.¹⁷

In this book which grew out of his Mellon lectures that were given during 1952 in the National gallery in Washington, Maritain brings to a point of culmination nearly forty years of study in the arts and in aesthetics. And in one of its aspects the book has it as a major concern to call into question the modern notion that the creative process in art is merely an *operational* process and that the artist is merely a special sort of technician. "As to the great artists," he says, "who take pleasure in describing themselves as mere engineers in the manufacturing of an artifact of words or sounds, as Paul Valéry did, and as Stravinsky does, I think that they purposely do not tell the truth, at least completely. In reality the spiritual content of a creative intuition, with the poetic or melodic sense it conveys, animates their artifact, despite their grudge against inspiration."¹⁸ And this must be so, because, as Maritain insists, the activity which produces poetic art does not begin until the poet permits himself to be invaded by the reality of "Things" and until he himself seeks to invade the deepest recesses of his own subjectivity — the two movements of the spirit being performed together, as though one, "in a moment of effective union." When the soul thus comes into profound spiritual contact with itself and when it also enters into the silent and mysterious depths of Being, it is brought back to "the single root" of its powers, "Where the entire subjectivity is, as it were, gathered in a state of expectation and virtual creativity."¹⁹ And the whole experience becomes "a state of obscure . . . and sapid knowing."²⁰ Then,

after the silent gathering a breath arises, coming not from the outside, but from the center of the soul—sometimes a breath which is almost imperceptible, but compelling and powerful, through which everything is given in easiness and happy expansion; sometimes a gale bursting all of a sudden, through which everything is given in violence and rapture; sometimes the gift of the beginning of a song; sometimes an outburst of un-stoppable words.²¹

And only when his point in the artistic process has been reached may *operation* begin. For the artist to initiate the process of *operation* at an earlier point is for

¹⁶ D. S. Savage, *The Withered Branch*. New York, Pellegrini & Cudahy, n.d., p. 12.

¹⁷ In the following account of this book that I give I have liberally raided two of the pages in an article of mine ("Maritain in His Role as Aesthete") that appeared in *The Review of Metaphysics* in March, 1955 (Vol. VIII, No. 3). I am indebted to the Editor for permitting this act of plunder.

¹⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1953, p. 62.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 243

him "to put the instrumental and secondary before the principal and primary, and to search for an escape though the discovery of a new external approach and new technical revolutions, instead of passing first through the creative source. . . ."²² Then, what is produced is but "a corpse of a work of art — a product of academism."²³ "If creative intuition is lacking," he says, "a work can be perfectly made, and it is nothing; the artist has nothing to say. If creative intuition is present, and passes, to some extent, into the work, the work exists and speaks to us, even if it is imperfectly made and proceeds from a man who has the habit of art and a hand which shakes."²⁴

At "the single root" of the poetic process, then, there is a profound act of creative intuition. And in this cognitive act, says Maritain, the soul "suffers things more than it learns them," experiencing them "through resonance in subjectivity." The thing that is cognitively grasped is simply "some complex of concrete and individual reality, seized in the violence of its sudden self-assertion and in the total unicity"²⁵ that is constituted by "all the other realities which echo in this existent, and which it conveys in the manner of a sign."²⁶ And it is the richness of this imaginative prehension that gives life and power to the mathematic of poetic form.

Maritain is, of course, a good Thomist, and he does not therefore need to be reminded that art is "a virtue of the practical intellect" and that it requires "all the logic and shrewdness, self-restraint and self-possession of working intelligence."²⁷ Indeed, he insists upon the essential relationship between art and reason, since it is reason that discovers the necessities in the nature of the medium that must be observed in order for the work to be brought into existence. But he also insists that the reason and the calculation that are in the poet "are there only to handle fire,"²⁸ and that to grant them anything more than this purely instrumental function, simply for the sake of adherence to a puritanical formalism and a spurious austerity, is to be guilty of a gratuitous dogmatism.

Now many of us will doubtless find it difficult to accept Maritain's argument in this book in its entirety, for there are phases of his psychology — particularly those that bear upon his doctrine of the spiritual preconscious — that will surely strike us as exceedingly cumbersome and perhaps even obscurantist. And I have adduced his testimony here not because it perfectly answers all of the questions that he raises. But, at a time when it is too much our habit to regard the medium as the single factor controlling the poetic process, Maritain's formula-

²² *Ibid.*, p. 223.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

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tion of the problem has the very great merit of eloquently reminding us again of the actual primacy in the process of *poetic vision*. He discloses to us, that is, a a strategem for declaring once again that it is not language which brings "meaning to birth" and which enables the mind "to order itself" — not language, but *vision*.

Eliseo Vivas also helps us to some extent, I believe, with our difficulties, when he reminds us that what is in part distinctive about the artist is his "passion for order."²⁹ "Really, universally," said Henry James, "relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so."³⁰ That is to say, the artist wants to give a shape and a significance to what Vivas calls "the primary data of experience." He wants to contain the rich plenitude of experience within a pattern that will illumine and give meaning to its multifarious detail and its bewildering contingency. But, of course, he cannot discover such a pattern unless he has a vantage point from which to view experience and by means of which his insights may be given order and proportion. Which is to say that he can transmute the viscous stuff of existential reality into the order of significant form only in accordance with what are his most fundamental beliefs about what is radically significant in life, and these beliefs he will have arrived at as a result of all the dealings that he has had with the religious and philosophical and moral and social issues that the adventure of living has brought his way. The imaginative writer's beliefs, to be sure, are very rarely highly "propositional" in character: they do not generally involve a highly schematized set of ideas or a fully integrated philosophic system. He customarily has something much less abstract — namely, a number of sharp and deeply felt insights into the meaning of the human story that control all his transactions with the world that lies before him. And it is by means of these insights that he discovers "the figure in the carpet."

Graham Greene, in his criticism, has often liked to observe that "Every creative writer worth our consideration, every writer who can be called in the wide eighteenth-century use of the term a poet, is a victim: a man given to an obsession,"³¹ or to what he sometimes calls a "ruling passion." And I take it that when he speaks in this way he has in mind the poet's habit of loyalty to some way of seeing things, by means of which he grapples and comes to terms with the tumultuous and fragmentary world that presses in upon him. That is to say, I assume that Greene has in mind the act of consent which the poet gives to some fundamental hypothesis about the nature of existence which itself in turn introduces structure and coherence for him into the formless stuff of life itself. And it is, indeed, I believe, this act that constitutes the real beginning of the poetic process: the rest is simply a matter of the kind of knowledgeable experi-

²⁹ Eliseo Vivas, *Creation and Discovery*, p. 117.

³⁰ Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934, p. 5.

³¹ Graham Greene, *The Lost Childhood*. New York, The Viking Press, 1952, p. 79.

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mentation within the limits of his medium that the expert craftsman engages in till he discovers what he wants to say gaining incarnation within a given form.

Now I am aware that I must appear to be advocating a view of the poetic process which, in point of fact, I do not hold at all. That is to say, in much that I have just now said it may have seemed that I was implying that, before even initiating the purely literary task, it is necessary for the poet to do an enormous amount of thinking. I have attributed to the writer's metaphysic or his beliefs a decisive role in the creative process, and thus it would seem that I am saying that it is necessary for the writer to engage in a great deal of abstract thinking before that process can even be initiated. But this I do not think is true at all. I do not, of course, want to associate myself with that tendency in modern literary theory which supports the supposition that the writer is not a thinker at all. This is a notion which T. S. Eliot has, I suppose, done more than anyone else to foster, and it is simply another instance of the confusion which his criticism, great as it is, occasionally contains. In his famous essay on "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" he tells us, for example, that the poet does not "think" but that he makes poetry out of thought and that, therefore, he cannot *as poet* be said to "believe" in the system of thought that lies behind his poetry. In the particular case with which he is dealing, he tells us that Shakespeare did not really "think," that he simply took the muddled and incompatible ideas of Seneca and Machiavelli and Montaigne and made poetry out of them. And Eliot having — and properly so — the enormous prestige in our time that he has, it is not surprising that our generation should have become for a time so convinced that Shakespeare was not a profound thinker, if he was a thinker at all, that he merely assimilated and felicitously re-expressed well-worn truisms. Or, again, in the case of Dante, he tells us that Dante did not "think" either, that he simply took the magnificent formulations of St. Thomas and used them as the foundation of his poem. But surely there is a great confusion here, for, as Martin Jarrett-Kerr has remarked, "If . . . we start from the initial conviction that one of the first marks of the major poet or novelist is the possession of a *fine mind*, we must refuse to concede that Shakespeare or Dante did not think but had their thinking done for them."³²

Eliot's error here results, I suspect, from the supposition that to acknowledge the poet as a thinker is in effect to say that the poetic process originates in a highly developed *system* of ideas, and this is, of course, not at all the case. What I have been calling the writer's "beliefs" are rarely if ever the highly "propositional" things that Eliot, in denying them the importance which I have given them, seems to think they are. For what the writer generally has is not a *system* of belief but rather an *imagination* of what is radically significant.

So, in insisting upon the writer's necessary dependence upon his beliefs, I am not at all intending to suggest that the poet or the novelist must, first of all,

³² Martin Jarrett-Kerr, *Studies in Literature and Belief*. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1955, p. 5.

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be a philosopher — though, on the other hand, I am not at all in accord with Eliot's contention that the poet is not really a thinker at all, a contention which is, by the way, significantly contradicted by Eliot's own career in poetry. There is a distinction somewhere in St. Thomas which illuminates, I think, the nature of the poet's relation to his beliefs. St. Thomas distinguishes between *cognitio per modum cognitionis* — knowledge, that is, in the manner of or by means of the intelligence or the discursive reason — and *cognitio per modum inclinationis*, knowledge, that is, in the manner of or by means of inclination. And what I would suggest is that the poet holds his "first principles" or his beliefs or his metaphysic *per modum inclinationis* — that is, inclinatory. Which is to say that his beliefs point in the direction of a coherent philosophy of life towards which his sensibility has an irresistible inclination and in which it finds its necessary sanction. The contrast between the two modes of cognition is, to be sure, not an absolute contrast, and what it is therefore proper to say is that it is the *tendency* of the poet to hold his beliefs *per modum inclinationis*, though there are some writers, Eliot among them, who hold their beliefs *per modum cognitionis*. But in whatever manner they may be held in the individual case, what I am now insisting upon principally is the precedence and the primacy of the act by which the poet searches experience and finds therein an ultimate concern that gives him then a perspective upon the flux and the flow.

Now whatever it is that concerns the poet ultimately, that constitutes his "ruling passion" and the substance of his *vision*, is something to which the critic can be attentive only as it is discoverable in the work. By now surely we have all taken to heart the lesson of Wimsatt and Beardsley on "The Intentional Fallacy," and we understand the irrelevance of any essay in literary criticism that is based upon some process of armchair psychoanalysis which seeks to elevate the biographical category of the artist's conscious intention into a category of aesthetic discrimination. But the designation of "intentionalism" as fallacious becomes itself a fallacy, if it is made to support the view that a work of literary art is "a merely formal structure devoid of embodied meanings and values."³³ For such aesthetic objects, though "they may be found in the realm of pure design or pure music,"³⁴ simply do not exist in the realm of literature where surely a main part of the critic's task involves the discovery of "the actual operative intention which, as telic cause, accounts for the finished work"³⁵ and which can be defined only in terms of the vision of the world which it serves. The work of art, says Denis de Rougemont, is a trap for the attention, but he also says that is an "oriented trap." That is to say, the authentic work of literary art is a "trap," in the sense that, having the kind of autonomy that modern criticism has claimed for it, it "has for its specific function . . . the magnetizing of the sensibility, the fascinating of the meditation"³⁶; as

³³ Eliseo Vivas, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

³⁶ Denis de Rougemont, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

Vivas would put it, it can command upon itself an act of "intransitive attention." But the trap is "oriented": it *focuses* the attention, that is, upon something which transcends the verbal structure itself, in those of its aspects that have claimed the poet's concern. And thus it is that the autonomy of the work is no more an absolute thing than is the intransitivity of the reader's attention, for both are qualified by the implicative relations that branch out indefinitely from the aesthetic fact towards the world by which that fact is surrounded.

Here it is, then, that we may discover the point of entry into the literary work that we have. For it is analysis of the sort that we have been conducting that reveals that the work is not a closed system and that it does not have that quality of "aseity" which Scholastic theologians have considered the Godhead to possess, by reason of the self-derived and eternally independent character of its being. The work is not wholly self-contained and utterly cut off from the reader, because in the creative process the aesthetic intentions of the artist are not segregated from all that most vitally concerns him as a human being but are, on the contrary, formed by these concerns and are thus empowered to orient the work towards the common human experience. Imaginative literature does not speak about this experience, of course, in the way that science speaks of it: it does not give us propositions about it: the poet does not generally force upon us interpretations of it: "Poetry is not interpretation," as Mr. Archibald MacLeish has remarked in a recent essay.³⁷ The poet is distinguished not by his skill in expounding a thesis but rather by his skill in *rendering* the human story, in *dramatizing* it, in making it *concrete* before the gaze of the mind. He makes us *look* at the living body of the world, and the meaning of what we look at appears to be quite indistinct from the form in which it is presented to us — so much so, indeed, that, in describing the mode of poetry's existence, we feel compelled to use such language as modern criticism has made familiar and to speak of its "autonomy."

But to stress the fact that poetic art signifies *by means of its structure* need not, I think, commit us to a formalism so purist as to require the view that the autonomy of the work is absolute. For, as I have been insisting, great literature does, in point of fact, always open toward the world, and that which keeps the universe of poetry from being hermetically sealed off from the universe of man is the poet's vision that it incarnates, of spaces and horizons, of cities and men, of time and eternity. This is why those modern theorists who tell us that the literary work is merely a verbal structure and that its analysis therefore involves merely a study of grammar and syntax — this is why they so completely miss the mark. They forget that writers use language with reference to what they know and feel and believe and that we can therefore understand their poems and novels only if we have some appreciation of how their beliefs have operated in enriching the meaning of the words that they employ. The "poem-in-itself," in other words, as merely a

³⁷ Archibald MacLeish, "The Language of Poetry," *The Unity of Knowledge*, ed. Lewis Leary. Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday & Co., 1955, p. 230.

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structure of language, is simply a naked abstraction, for the real poem, the real novel, is something that we begin to appropriate only as we seek some knowledge of the context of belief and the quality of vision out of which it springs and with reference to which the words on the printed page have their fullest and richest meaning.

Now we have, I think, arrived at the point in our argument at which it is finally possible for me to turn immediately to the generality of the subject which I was assigned. For what I can now say is that the aspect of poetic art to which I have been referring by the terms *vision* and *belief* is precisely the element which we ought to regard as constituting the religious dimension of imaginative literature. When I speak of the religious dimension of literary art, in other words, I do not have in mind any special iconical materials stemming from a tradition of orthodoxy which may or may not appear in a given work. For were it to be so conceived, it might indeed then be something peripheral and inorganic to the nature of literature itself; whereas the way of regarding our problem that I now want to recommend is one that involves the proposal that the religious dimension is something intrinsic to and constitutive of the nature of literature as such. And I am here guided in my understanding of what is religious in the orders of cultural expression by the conception of the matter that has been so ably advanced by the distinguished Protestant theologian Professor Paul Tillich. In all the work that he has done in the philosophy of culture over the past thirty years the persistent strain that is to be noted is one that arises out of his insistence upon what might be called the co-inherence of religion and culture. He likes to say that "Religion is the substance of culture and culture the form of religion."³⁸ He has remarked, for example:

If any one, being impressed by the mosaics of Ravenna or the ceiling paintings of the Sistine Chapel, or by the portraits of the older Rembrandt, should be asked whether his experience was religious or cultural, he would find the answer difficult. Perhaps it would be correct to say that his experience was cultural as to form, and religious as to substance. It is cultural because it is not attached to a specific ritual-activity; and religious, because it evokes questioning as to the Absolute or the limits of human existence. This is equally true of painting, of music and poetry, of philosophy and science. . . . Wherever human existence in thought or action becomes a subject of doubts and questions, wherever unconditioned meaning becomes visible in works which only have conditioned meaning in themselves, there culture is religious.³⁹

And Professor Tillich has acknowledged that it is to the theoretical comprehension of this "mutual immanence of religion and culture" that his philosophy of religion is primarily dedicated. "No cultural creation," he says, "can hide its religious ground,"⁴⁰ and its religious ground is formed by the "ultimate concern" to which

³⁸ Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1948, p. 57.

³⁹ Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, p. 49.

⁴⁰ *The Protestant Era*, p. 57.

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it bears witness, for that, he insists, is what religion is: it "is ultimate concern."⁴¹ And since it is religion, in this sense, that is truly substantive in the various symbolic expressions of a culture, the task of criticism, in whatever medium it may be conducted, is, at bottom, that of deciphering the given work at hand in such a way as to reveal the ultimate concern which it implies. For, as he says, in the depth of every cultural creation "there is an ultimate . . . and [an] all-determining concern, something absolutely serious,"⁴² even if it is expressed in what are conventionally regarded as secular terms.

It should, of course, be said that, in these definitions, Professor Tillich is not seeking to *identify* religion and culture; but he does want to avoid the error that T. S. Eliot has cautioned us against, "of regarding religion and culture as two separate things between which there is a *relation*."⁴³ For what he recognizes is that the whole cultural process by which man expresses and realizes his rational humanity is actually governed by what are his most ultimate concerns — his concerns, that is, "with the meaning of life and with all the forces that threaten or support that meaning . . ."⁴⁴ And, in passing, it is, I think, worth remarking that it is this profoundly realistic approach to the problem of cultural interpretation that enables Professor Tillich to see that in our own period the most radically religious movements in literature and painting and music may gain expression in strangely uncanonical terms — in despairing maledictions and in apocalyptic visions of "the abyss" of disintegration that threatens the world today. For, as he would say, in the very profundity with which *Wozzeck* and the *Guernica* and *The Waste Land* express the disorder of the times there is an equally profound witness to the spiritual order that has been lost, so that these great expressions of the modern movement in art are rather like a confused and uncertain prayer that corresponds to the second petition of the *Our Father*.⁴⁵

We are now brought to the point at which we must regather our bearings by a final act of recapitulation. We have said that the work of literary art is a special sort of linguistic structure that traps the attention intransitively; but we have also argued that the intransitivity of the reader's attention is not absolute, since the autonomy of the object which captures his attention is not itself absolute. The literary work is a trap, but it is a trap that is *oriented* toward the world of existence that transcends the work — and the work is *oriented* by the *vision*, by the *belief*, by the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

⁴³ T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1949, pp. 31-32.

⁴⁴ James Luther Adams, "Tillich's Concept of the Protestant Era," Editor's Appendix, *The Protestant Era*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1948, p. 273.

⁴⁵ M. de Rougemont says that "art would appear to be like an invocation (more often than not unconscious) to the lost harmony, like a prayer (more often than not confused), corresponding to the second petition of the Lord's prayer—"Thy Kingdom come." *Vide op. cit.*, p. 186.

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ultimate concern of which it is an incarnation: its *orientation*, that is to say, is essentially religious. And this is why criticism itself must, in the end, be theological. The prevailing orthodoxy in contemporary criticism, to be sure, generally represents hostility toward the idea of metaphysical and theological considerations being introduced into the order of critical discourse. But, as Leslie Fiedler has remarked:

The "pure" literary critic, who pretends, in the cant phrase, to stay "inside" a work all of whose metaphors and meanings are pressing outward, is only half-aware. And half-aware, he deceives; for he cannot help smuggling unexamined moral and metaphysical judgments into his "close analyses," any more than the "pure" literary historian can help bootlegging unconfessed aesthetic estimates into his chronicles. Literary criticism is always becoming "something else," for the simple reason that literature is always "something else."⁴⁴

Our abdication from the reigning poetics of our time is, however, only partial, for the religious dimension of literature, as we have defined it, must be regarded as something which, in so far as it is really a datum for critical inspection and assessment, exists in the language of the work. For the only thing that lies before the critic is a composition in language, and, after all, it is, presumably, his skill in the supervision of language that *primarily* distinguishes the literary artist: surely it would be wrongheaded to assume that the thing that makes him an artist is the profundity or the novelty of his vision: no, he makes good his vocational claim in the republic of letters by the extent of the success with which he shapes the substance of experience, in accordance with his vision of what it is that makes it ultimately meaningful. And he can give a significant form or shape to experience only in so far as he takes the highest kind of advantage of the medium in which his art is wrought. So it may, then, I think, be taken for granted that whatever it is that *orients* a work of literary art or that constitutes the *ultimate concern* that it embodies is something that will disclose itself in the ways in which the writer brings the resources of language into the service of his project. And thus we shall want very carefully to preserve all that has been gained in modern criticism as a result of its methodological researches into the problem of how the language of imaginative literature is to be understood and talked about. But for the critic to insist upon remaining merely a kind of grammarian is for him to forego many of the most interesting and significant discriminations that literary criticism can make. For, though the literary work is a special sort of linguistic structure, that which holds the highest interest for us is the special seizure of reality towards which this structure is instrumental. It is, in other words, the nature of literature itself that compels the critic finally to move beyond the level of verbal analysis to the level of metaphysical and theological valuation. On this level, of course, he can establish the propriety of his judgments only by reference to his own insight, his own scale

⁴⁴ Leslie Fiedler, "Toward an Amateur Criticism," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (Autumn, 1950), p. 564.

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of values, his own sense of what is important in art and in life. And, as the English critic, S. L. Bethell, has remarked,

if he is a Christian worthy of the name, his whole outlook will be coloured by his religion; he will see life in Christian terms, and, though he may ignore an atheist writer's professed atheism, he will still judge his degree of insight into character by his own insight, which will have been formed in part by his Christian experience. And the non-Christian critic—let us be clear about this—will also judge a writer's insight into character (or into anything else, of course) by the standard of his own insight, however derived. There is no "impartial criticism" in this sense, or rather there is no critical neutrality; there are only Christian critics and Marxist critics and Moslem critics—and critics who think themselves disinterested but who are really swayed unconsciously by the beliefs they have necessarily acquired by being members of a particular society in a particular place and time.⁴⁷

And, as Bethell observes with great shrewdness,

the last are really the least impartial, for, believing themselves impartial, they are open to every unconscious influence upon their judgment, while the "doctrinaire" critic may keep his doctrine well in view and, if not entirely avoiding prejudice, may at least give his readers fair warning of what to expect.⁴⁸

But now at this point you may very well want to raise the question as to whether my use of these quotations from Bethell is calculated to suggest that we are justified in trying to guarantee literary art by the quality of belief that it possesses. And, were the question to be put to me, my impulse, as a Christian, would, I think, be to say with Roy W. Battenhouse that "the good poet should be able, like Adam in the Garden, to name every creature correctly. Apprehending the form of each thing that is brought before him, he should be able to assign it its proper place."⁴⁹ But, of course, this capacity, which so influentially determines the outcome of the artistic process, is itself very largely dependent upon the artist's metaphysical or religious orientation — so that, as a Christian, I should again feel prompted to say with Battenhouse that

if it is true that the light with which an artist sees inclines to affect the justness of his observations, the presence of full light cannot but clarify the issues of proportion and order. With inadequate lighting, the artist will not see certain things he ought to see; it will be all too easy for him to draw disproportionately what he does see. To put it another way the artist who takes up his location in Plato's cave has not the same chance as he who sets up shop by Christ's open tomb.⁵⁰

In principle, I should, in other words, expect the Christian reader at least — *all other things being equal* — more enthusiastically to give his suffrage to a literature that was Christianly oriented than to one which was not. But, now, not as a matter

⁴⁷ S. L. Bethell, *Essays on Literary Criticism and the English Tradition*. London, Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1948, p. 24-25.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ Roy W. Battenhouse, "The Relation of Theology to Literary Criticism," *The Journal of Bible and Religion*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 (February, 1945), p. 20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

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of principle but as a matter of fact, the Christian reader lives in a period whose characteristic quality, at least ever since the Renaissance, has been defined, as Erich Heller has reminded us, not merely by a dissociation of faith from knowledge but by what has been the profounder severance of faith from sensibility. "It is this rift," says Heller, "which has made it impossible for most Christians not to *feel*, or at least not to feel *also* as true many 'truths' which are incompatible with the truth of their faith."⁵¹ They have, in other words, been in very much the same position that the father of the possessed child was in, whom the Synoptist records as having cried out: "Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief" (*The Gospel According to St. Mark* 9:24). And, this being the case, the Christian reader will *actually* respond to the various beliefs which literature may present with much the same latitudinarianism that any other sensitive reader in our time will bring to bear upon his dealings with literary art: that is to say, what he will principally require is that the view of life that is conveyed by the given poem or novel commend itself as a *possible* view, as one to which an intelligent and sensitive observer of the human scene *might* be led by a sober consideration of the facts of experience. And, though he will agree with Eliot that to judge a work of art by artistic standards and to judge it by religious standards ought to "come in the end to the same thing,"⁵² he will recognize, as Eliot does, that in our time, this is an end at which none of us is likely to arrive.

⁵¹ Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought*. Philadelphia, Dufour & Saifer, 1952, p. 125.

⁵² T. S. Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

On the Possibility of a Christian Criticism of the Arts

JOHN W. DIXON, JR.

The title of this comment suggests the limitations within which it must work, as against the much broader boundaries of the other articles in this symposium. They work, not only within a context of general acceptance of the idea of a specifically Christian approach to literature but on a solid foundation of critical experience and respectable critical literature. It is a matter of particular note, in our present intellectual city, that a sizeable group of scholars, most of them young and still short of the fullness of their productivity and thought, should have erected so well constructed, commodious, and weathertight a structure. It is a matter of contrary note that the critics of the visual arts should still be reconnoitering the ground and asking whether the particular character of their common enterprise permits their separation from their non-Christian colleagues to any degree.

It is certainly true that there is no comparable body of critical literature nor a comparable chest of critical tools. It is necessary, then, to determine why this should be so and to try to define the nature of the specific problem that faces the art critic and historian if he is to overtake the literary critics.

The differences in what is presently possible to the two disciplines find their origin in the conditions of growth which have very differently characterized each of them. These differences of condition might be oversimplified and summed up under two tags: accessibility and identification.

Even prior to the printing press it was possible for a considerable number of people to own what was, in fact, the original work of literary art. After the printing press, it was possible for thousands, then millions, of people to have the original work. The natural result was that the intelligent discussion of a wide range of literature became a natural part of cultivated life. This is good soil for the growth of intelligent professional criticism.

Furthermore, publication means identification. The name of the author is irrevocably fixed and even the date is often as well fixed. While the identification of author and date are by no means insignificant in literary research, relatively speaking they are questions of far less importance and certainly occupy no such generative position as they do with the visual arts.

These facts are not absolutely to the advantage of the study of literature. Literary criticism in the western intellectual world is nearly two and one half millennia old. A great many things have been done; the desperate need to justify their

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own existence has lead many critics to construct eccentric personal systems of criticism; and it is possible, in horrible fascination, to watch the poor artist and his work disappear in the quicksand of his interpreters. At the same time, literary criticism is a versatile and tempered tool, a varied and disciplined procedure which can sustain and equip the critic who undertakes a new approach.

Contemporary art criticism is, on the other hand, created by, and has its character and its limits determined by, one thing — the need to establish the corpus and the need to make it available. Where literary works are multiple, art works are singular. It is only with the development, to a reasonably useful stage, of photography of art works that a wide range of art works became even approximately available to the critical community. Hence, prior to the twentieth century really useable criticism came only from exceptional individuals who, like Baudelaire, could react sensitively to a few works or who, like Vasari, had access to a wide range of art works in time although limited in space to his own country. There never developed any general body of criticism at the level of professional competence characterizing literary criticism.

Even more determinative in modern art criticism is the establishment of the corpus, for it is the techniques for the performance of that task that establish the language the critic now speaks. The art critic and historian in the early days of the craft faced a situation closer to chaos than to an ordered body of usable material. His material was a vast range of artifacts without names, or with false names and certainly so many of each of those that authentic identification could not be accepted as such without rigorous testing. Nor was the dating of the works any better.

Furthermore, since art works are physical objects, they have suffered all the damages that physical objects can suffer. In innumerable ways, they are damaged, then repaired, restored, improved and modernized until often little of the original is left.

Consequently, alongside the other lines of criticism and research paralleling the other disciplines (sometimes, in fact, deriving from them), there grew up the main line of art criticism and history: the formation of the *catalogue raisonné*. The primary question was (and still is), "Who did it and when?" The techniques for this process can neither be pure connoisseurship, for the most sensitive eye will make bad mistakes unless disciplined by historical research, nor pure art history, for the finest historian will err unless enlightened by the sensitive eye. Each of these techniques develop separately and differently in different persons. There are pure pedants among historians and pure solo lyricists among the critics and, indeed, each has his characteristic usefulness. Yet the work carried forward primarily by the sensitive and judicious use of each of these basic approaches.

These approaches involve a variety of methods which themselves have important consequences for this study.

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The first (and perhaps lowest) method is straight historical research into the facts concerning a work. It is basically like historical research in any discipline with the characteristic requirement of rigorous and disciplined objectivity. This kind of research establishes the indispensable factual basis that underlies all serious research in any field.

The study of subject matter (iconography) is a form of historical research necessary to place the work in its proper setting as well as to determine in a basic sense what it is. Again, this can be done mechanically, but properly done the net effect is to place the art work in its true relation to the general course of ideas in its time. In a widening circle there are other ranges of art historical research designed to determine what a work is and where it stands in the development of art and culture.

Connoisseurship, similarly, operates at different levels. At its lowest and most practical level, the identification of characteristic handling of objective forms, it is an indispensable aid to identification of works of art and serves further to discriminate among the individual characteristics of artists. At a higher level, connoisseurship depends on an almost intuitive sense of the distinctiveness of particular works; yet it is a sense that must be firmly grounded in a discriminating grasp of the individual personality of the artist.

At its highest level connoisseurship becomes the interpretation of modes of vision and the unique structure of art works. At this point there is a coalescence of history and connoisseurship for vision and structure are found to change slowly and intelligibly and in direct relation to — either as generator or a principal element in — the fundamental movements of the human spirit. Yet the concepts involved in meaning and structure have significance only as they are embodied in the works of individuals. Hence, the highest achievement of the art critic-historian — the grasp of the fundamental life of the forms — is at the same time the most complete statement of the creative individuality of the artist and the time in which he lives.

Thus the *catalogue raisonné* is not simply a monument to industry and ingenuity, but as the coalescence of all these methods it is in schematic form the life of a great man. It is his life and all its meaning as clearly as an honest work can make it.

Thus one of the most exciting things in art history is the gradual emergence of individuals in all their concrete and unrepeatable singularity. This is done most usefully with the clarification of the work of major artists, freeing their work of accretions, ordering the genuine works so some coherent understanding of their meaning can be attained. At other times a forgotten and unknown artist is raised from the dead. An unidentified work of distinction is isolated and its unknown author given a label, "Master of —," "Student of —." Stylistic criticism gathers around it, until, often, research recovers the name of the artist and a human being with a significant amount of his life work is again part of the human enterprise.

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The method so described is a kind of clarified positivism. It has the objective intensity that positivism seeks but determined less by artificial metaphysical presuppositions than by the needs of the particular task. The evidence is not artificially limited by epistemological assumption. Rather the evidence engenders the methods which are flexible and expandable according to the needs of the evidence.

This attitude of receptive humility before the object is certainly compatible with Christianity. The main result of this attitude is a fully Christian goal: the absolute respect for the distinctiveness of the unrepeatable human person in all the fullness of his singularity.

This situation creates something of a problem for the conscientious Christian who asks himself not only whether he should, but whether he can, contribute to a distinctively Christian criticism. The present state of his material requires certain types of research, and therefore his professional training is largely directed toward that kind of research which is, mainly, divorced from anything but technical competence and the sensitivity and integrity with which he can use his tools. Furthermore, if he can claim that the major task of his profession — the preservation or recovery of human singularity — is in accord with a major precept of his faith, he is likely to raise the question even more strongly. To attempt to answer this question it is necessary to look not at the virtues of contemporary art criticism but at its vices or at least its weakness and dangers. These can be found under conditions that remove those characteristics of the evidence that have so strongly determined the course of modern criticism.

These weaknesses and dangers can be seen most clearly, perhaps, in the criticism of contemporary art. Obviously, most of the disciplined techniques of the historical research are inappropriate, and the result is an unsightly display of complete intellectual confusion in most of the critical literature on contemporary art. Art today is vital and vigorous, deserving important consideration, but much of the critical literature speaks of art works now as the sacramental objects in a cosmic mystery religion. Apart from determining the historical locus of a work and defining its structure and the mode of vision that went into it the critic too often finds himself at a loss for something to say (Two notable exceptions, men who write with clarity and cogency about modern art, are Meyer Schapiro, a noted historian, and Alfred Barr, a museum director and connoisseur. But this is a description of trends, not a blanket indictment.)

Another symptom of significance is the quality of performance of specialists when they extend themselves beyond the area of their special competence. The best example of this is Bernard Berenson, with the exception of Max Friedlander the most notable connoisseur of his day. No one working in the field has a more sensitive eye or a judgment on certain problems of attribution more to be trusted. Yet whenever he speaks of more general problems or attempts to relate the art work to fundamental philosophical issues what he says is so gauche as to cause his colleagues to cringe in embarrassment.

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Similarly, many an art historical article has issued in firmly stated and cogently argued results that simply do not fit the nature of an art work. The general sense of what an art work is, what it means in the human economy, is too weak and diffuse to act as an effective check, outside the results of a particular piece of special research.

Obviously, the problem is created by the fact that the work of art is not the sum of the results of different methods any more than the cake is the sum of the ingredients that go into it. The art work may not be understandable (at the moment, certainly) by contemplating the end product apart from the parts whose fusion make up the work. Yet, there is the art work which can be grasped only as a fusion of the component elements, and until there is a grasp of the meaning of that work art will continue to be the artifact of the scholars or the idol of the art journalists and not a vital part of life.

Erwin Panofsky is generally, and deservedly, considered the leading art historian of his day. No student but owes him an enormous debt, not only in the field of his special dominance, iconography, but in his classic papers on perspective and on proportion and others equally important. Yet, the off moments of a great scholar can be symptomatic.

One of these is Prof. Panofsky's widely distributed *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*. This work could most charitably be described as a tour de force produced by a man with a powerful scholarly machine who has fun on his day off turning it loose to see what will happen. Apart from its complete dependence on analogy, highly suspect in scholarly circles ever since Spengler's *Decline of the West*, the archetype of all such arguments, it is impeachable on quite specific points. Prof. Panofsky in Section Two apparently sees no further alternative beyond "a mere parallelism" between art and philosophy and the individual influences, "exerted on painters, sculptors, or architects by erudite advisors." He thus presupposes a "mental habit" found in both philosophers and architects. This leads him to present a picture of architecture developing in scholastic terms; for example he pictures an architect superimposing the "Non" of a rose window on the "Sic" of the window beneath. Further, purely architectural developments are worked out according to the scheme, *videtur quod, sed contra, respondeo dicendum*.

After the reader has recovered himself from his astonishment at the agility evident in these intellectual acrobatics and after he has paid due gratitude for a remarkable summary of complex problems and to a stimulating discussion, he must regretfully conclude that the case rests on no evidence at all and hence is not only not proven but is virtually irrelevant to the idea of proof. There has been no contribution to human knowledge. Not the least astonishing thing about this remarkable work is the casual manner in which the individual integrity of the art work disappears altogether and no less a monument than Chartres can be discussed as one of two buildings in the *sed contra* needed "to get rid of the extra towers surmounting the transept and the crossing." History here is not the instrument but the assassin of the individual.

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In contrast to this is one of the most significant recent contributions to a Christian understanding of the arts, Otto von Simson's *The Gothic Cathedral*. This book covers much of the same problem suggested by Panofsky's title. Yet here the procedure is not by analogy but by a careful and solidly documented definition of what might be called the Christian imagination of the period. The Christian mentality of that time worked out its understanding of the meaning of God's order in all areas of its life, and the interlocking of the different areas of that understanding is the subject of the book. This is not an argument by analogy but a structure of intellectual interdependence. The art work is not an intriguing decoration to the history of ideas but a primary and irreplaceable means for achieving understanding, of laying hold on reality, of manifesting the understanding and the service involved in it.

There is no doubt Prof. Panofsky has a concept of the art work, but in this small book, victimized by his own skill, he is neither informed by it nor is it determinable from the evidence provided. Prof. von Simson, on the other hand, has set himself the task (and performed it) of defining what art was to medieval man and what these particular monuments (St. Denis and Chartres) meant in the structure of medieval faith and understanding.

Such books (for there are more doing this kind of work) provide a clear chart for the next development in a Christian understanding of the arts, a development firmly rooted in the great tradition of art historical criticism discussed earlier. It is a matter of entering on the heritage of Christian understanding of life by means of the arts. If it is objected that the very objectivity of this process makes it accessible to all scholars, Christian or not, the reply must be that theoretically that is true. Even in practice, "secular" scholarship has contributed enormously to the Christian's task of understanding his own art. Yet in practice there are questions vital to the Christian that simply don't seem important to the non-Christian. Furthermore, there is a quality to all human experience which is finally accessible only to those who are truly a part of it.

It is healthy for Christians to see the documents of their faith handled with the same cold detachment appropriate to any laboratory specimen. It can remind us that incarnation means that God's substantial revelation is still, in our hands, partial and relevant and time bound and hence is subject, as all the works of man, to objective examination. The Holy One of Israel was subject to the casual obtuseness of the Roman soldiers. But there are areas which can be entered only by sympathy.

Even, however, when this job is done the whole work of the Christian critic is not done. What will have been done will be to have defined what art was to the people who produced it. It might further be possible to determine what relevance non-Christian art has to certain kinds of Christian thought. This was suggested by Paul Tillich's provocative and provoking statement that Picasso's *Guernica* is the greatest Protestant work of the twentieth century. And the reflection on these things must be done with a professional responsibility that can make of the conclusions a contribution to the whole enterprise.

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Yet the work is still not complete and it might even be said that the most important part will not have been done. What will have been accomplished will be (as its partial accomplishment is now) immensely useful: the definition of what art has meant in the search for wholeness and for humanness in a particular epoch. We will, perhaps, begin to determine more clearly what our own art means in our immediate life. We still do not know what all art means to us, for we do not know what the art work is.

The problem so ably stated by Mr. Scott is the same for the visual arts as it is for literature. If anything, it is intensified by the fact that literature is a temporal art and the visual arts are spatial. The relations which are the structure of a literary work are relations in time, moving in a rhythm and to an end which in part is measurable in human terms. It is possible therefore for the Christian critics to make their system of criticism, having works intelligible to it. They can ground themselves firmly in the human experience which is the material transmuted into the art work. They can grasp the relations of this human experience, the interaction with the verbal structure of the work, the end to which the whole action moves. These things have a character and a quality definable within the terminology now developed in the criticism of literature.

There is no such terminology in art criticism. Willy Loman's character has a specific human and moral reference. The color red does not. The working out of Willy Loman's fate has a general human significance that can be defined. The development of the color red in its relation to other colors and forms, even when these contain representations with a direct reference to an outside world, has a significance equally great. We simply lack the vocabulary and the philosophical concept to express the significance. It is regrettable but not surprising that critics who cannot stand secure on the base of their historical researches turn gnostic in their writings.

The work of art is made up of meaningful objects in meaningful relations to each other on a plane surface or in space. There is no place in our metaphysics for such a thing and no method in our epistemology for laying hold of it.

The medieval cathedral meant something specific and definable to medieval man. We no longer accept the cosmology which the cathedral symbolizes, nor the light metaphysics it embodies. Yet we still respond deeply and meaningfully to it. It is immensely useful to us to see how other men ordered themselves in their world according to their faith, but even high level nostalgia of this type is not sufficient. It arouses strong emotions in us but the description of them easily becomes sentimentality. There is simply more to know here than we can yet state.

This is a general situation, not one applicable only to Christians. Yet the Christians, if their faith is as true as they think it, may make a decisive contribution to the common enterprise, not simply explain things to their own satisfaction. At this

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time it is possible only to state the question, not even to suggest answers. But it is possible to suggest the direction in which answers might be found.

Perhaps the most serious attempt to arrive at a theoretical statement of this question has been made not by a critic or a historian but by a theologian, Paul Tillich. His comments are invariably enlightening and stimulating, and they contribute notably, not only to the subject but to that rare and precious thing, intelligible communication between disciplines. Unfortunately, these comments lead to an untenable critical position.

To Tillich the art work is the instrument whereby man grapples with the reality of his situation. Whether or not a work is religious or Christian must then be measured by the seriousness of the artist's awareness of ultimate issues and the extent of his "ultimate concern." This has lead Tillich on occasion to speak of a "religious style" (which turns out to be remarkably close to German expressionism).

This is intelligent discourse. But it makes the art work an instrument. Such a question can be settled only by philosophical aesthetics, not in a paper devoted to the more practical problems of criticism. Suffice it to say here that the problem revolves on the question of the nature of the art work. This question then resolves itself into positions that are basically ontological, epistemological, or existential. Is the art work a new object, an addition to creation only incidentally related to the rest of creation? Is the art work an instrument of knowledge designed to lay hold on and communicate the artist's understanding of this area of man's experience? Is the art work an instrument of man's encounter with experience? Is the work some combination of these or can each of these possibilities refer to different works of art?

These questions cannot be argued here. A bold statement of my personnel position would be that the art work is a new thing, an addition to creation, but in being made it uses materials drawn from creation and experience and in using interprets them. There must be room for van Gogh and Cezanne, Kandinsky and Mondrian, Grünewald and Piero della Francesca. The question of religion and Christianity must not be determined by the degree of adherence to a predetermined pattern of style, but it must be referable to some central principle of judgment.

It seems highly unlikely that, in our time, there will emerge a sufficiently coherent cosmology to seek the explanation along those lines, leading as they must into metaphysics. Rather a flank attack on the metaphysical problem might be mounted and the answer sought in the Christian drama. Preston Roberts has indicated how the "Christian tragedy" can serve as the key for the definition of drama. Similarly, the Christian ordering of events might serve as a key to the understanding of the place of the art work.

The basic categories here are creation, the image of God, sin, and redemption.¹

¹ These categories were first suggested to me by an unpublished manuscript by James Luther Adams. These are defined almost completely differently, however, so he can in no way be blamed for them.

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Man is created and is part of a larger creation. Yet he is not just another part of creation. He is created in the image of God, appointed in creation to have dominion over it, to fill the earth and subdue it. His art is an instrument of his dominion. Yet, if he is faithful to the Creator, he does not attempt to subdue creation to be an instrument of his lust for domination. His art, then, is an instrument for bringing creation to its full purpose, for making things more what they are in their nature.

Yet, again, man is not just the image of God. He is rebelling against God's will and God's grace. Not content with the dominion over creation assigned to him, man seeks to be as God and to have all knowledge and power over creation. His art is corrupted by his sin and becomes an instrument of power.

Man cannot make a redemptive art, but he can make an art that communicates what he experiences of redemption as a man and what he knows of it as an artist. God in his infinite wisdom may use an art work as an instrument of redemption, but what serves or can serve that purpose is beyond the knowledge of man.

Concrete examples may make these categories clearer. In the arts of creation a singular kind of graceful, natural life seems to flow through the work. It is the joy of the Garden before the fall, life immediately under the grace of God. This is the peace and serenity, the order and harmony when the structure of God's creation constitutes man's peace.

Man is no longer in the Garden and can never quite see the world in the joyous freshness of its creation. He is always touched by the Fall. Yet the artist above all cultivates the innocence and directness of vision that are associated with unfallen nature. Much of the music of Mozart has this quality of joy in the things that are, simply because they are.

In the visual arts, this category can be found in much of Gothic art where nature and wit are found together even on noble and austere monuments. In the Northern Renaissance (Italy was nearly always — but not always — too preoccupied with intellect and structure) the whole of nature and the works of man seem to vibrate with a light from the face of the creator God.

A humbler form of it is found in Seventeenth Century Holland where the things man has made are seen in their singular thingness under the glowing light of the sky. Much of this painting is ostentatious display but much is an astonished loving of the things that are.

In a less simple way Rouault transcended the tragedy of his early work and his late landscapes glow with the sense of a new earth. Yet it is less the earth of the Garden of Eden than it is the garden where the tomb was on Easter morning, and thus these works belong in a later category.

In those arts that proceed from man's character as created in the image of God, man is self-conscious about creation and his place in it. He probes and tests. He is less content with the morning freshness of things as they might have been at the

dawn of creation and seeks to find their inner laws. For the sake of the deeper order of things he controls severely the external appearance. He imposes on the work the order of his mind which is controlled by his apprehension of the order of things in their essential being. Nearly all significant artists have this quality strong in their work even if its center of gravity lies elsewhere. Primarily this category includes artists like Cezanne and Piero della Francesca, rather than men who seek the existential engagement with the vitality of existence. They are the men who seek that understanding of life that can give man dominion over it.

The arts of the Fall present a double aspect. Both show forth the brokenness of the world and the rebellion of man. In one aspect, however, the artist is concerned to explore the Fall. Properly the artists in this category are the ones who see sin as part of the substance of the heart of man, built into his being. They are the men who engage the very stuff of life, the tragic poets and music makers. In the visual arts there were the late Gothic sculptors, the Renaissance artists who could see beyond simple humanism — Michelangelo in the Medici chapel, for example, rather than Michelangelo in the David. Then, for another example, Goya, and in our own day, Picasso and Rouault of the *Miserere* and the early works showing prostitutes and judges.

Yet art cannot only analyze the sin of man. As a human enterprise it can manifest that sin. All that man does tends to some extreme that would destroy him if it comes into existence. Examples of this can be seen in the consuming sexuality of much Indian art that sees man as only a process in nature. Or some Roman art that asserts the pure brutality of power. Or some forms of modern art that would make the artist as God creating from nothing.

Only God is the redeemer, and the artist who sets himself the task of an art of redemption (as some have done) only manifests further the arts of the Fall, the setting up of false gods as idols. Yet the artist works in a world where redemption is the key act in the ordering of life. No Christian who takes his work and his faith seriously can go on acting as though the order of the world is one thing and the act of redemption is an act like all others, of relevance only to the individual who might take note of it.

It isn't sufficient for the artist to describe the redemptive acts as his subject matter. His work must embody the structure of events out of which the work of redemption could proceed and within which it still acts. This means encompassing the great tensions that are the Christian description of the order of things: matter and soul or, better, enspirited matter; sin and sanctity; tragedy and triumph. No purely tragic work can be in the order of redemption, for it is only tragedy redeemed that can be fully loyal to the redeeming Lord.

Of these are the great dramas like "King Lear" and the music like Bach's "St. Matthew Passion." It includes certain sculpture on Chartres cathedral,

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Donatello's "Pulpits" and Michaelangelo's "Rodanini Pieta", "Titan's "Flagellation" and "Pieta", all of Rembrandt's late work and Grünewald's "Crucifixion."

In our day it is Rouault's late work, especially the great landscapes of the fifties. Here the tragedy has become a peace out of pain, and all nature glows in the light out of darkness of the rebirth of Creation at Easter. These are not just landscapes recording nature. They are hymns to the glory of the God who could say, "Behold I make all things new."

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Protestantism and the Contemporary Style in the Visual Arts

PAUL TILlich

In a recent discussion about Protestantism and the visual arts, I made the statement that Picasso's "Guernica" is a most Protestant painting. Of course, I qualified my statement by saying that it is not the Protestant answer but the radicalism of the Protestant question which one can find in Picasso's masterpiece. It is to this assertion that the following article is directed.

First, something must be said about the particular character of the Protestant understanding of man and his predicament. The Protestant principle (which is not always effective in the preaching and teaching of the Protestant churches) emphasizes the infinite distance between God and man. It emphasizes man's finitude, his subjection to death, but above all, his estrangement from his true being and his bondage to demonic forces — forces of self-destruction. Man's inability to liberate himself from this bondage has led the Reformers to the doctrine of a reunion with God in which God alone acts and man only receives. Such receiving, of course, is not possible in an attitude of passivity, but it demands the highest courage, namely the courage to accept the paradox that "the sinner is justified," that it is man in anxiety, guilt and despair who is the object of God's unconditional acceptance.

If we consider the picture of Picasso as an example — perhaps *the* outstanding one — of an artistic expression of the human predicament in our period, its negative-Protestant character is obvious. The question of man in a world of guilt, anxiety, and despair is put before us with tremendous power. But it is not the subject matter — the willful and brutal destruction of a small town by Fascist airplanes — which gives the picture its expressive force; rather, it is its style. In spite of profound differences between the individual artists and between the different periods in the development of Picasso himself, this style is characteristic for the twentieth century and, in this sense, it is contemporaneous with us. A comparison of any important creation within this period with equally important creations of any earlier period shows the stylistic unity of the visual arts in the twentieth century. And this style, as no other one during the history of Protestantism, is able to express the human situation as Christianity sees it.

In order to verify this assertion, it is necessary to discuss the relation of artistic styles to religion generally. Every work of art shows three elements — subject matter, form, style. The subject matter is potentially identical with everything which can be received by the human mind in sensory images. It is in

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no way limited by other qualities like good or bad, beautiful or ugly, whole or broken, human or inhuman, divine or demonic. But not every subject matter is used by every artist or artistic period. There are principles of selection dependent on form and style — the second and third elements of a work of art.

The second element is a concept which is not an ordinary one. It belongs to the structural elements of being itself and can be understood only as that which makes a thing what it is. It gives a thing its uniqueness and universality, its special place within the whole of being, its expressive power. Artistic creation is determined by the form which uses particular materials such as sounds, words, stones, colors and elevates them to a work which stands on its own. For this reason, the form is the ontologically decisive element in every artistic creation — as in any other creation. But the form itself is qualified by the third element which we call style. This term, first used to describe changing fashions in clothing, houses, gardens, etc., has been applied to the realm of artistic production universally and has even been used in relation to philosophy, politics, etc. The style qualifies the many creations of a period in a unique way. It is due to their form that they are creations. It is due to their style that they have something in common. The problem of style is one of finding what it is that these creations of the same style have in common. To what do they all point? Deriving my answer from many analyses of style, both in art and philosophy, I would say that every style points to a self-interpretation of man, thus answering the question of the ultimate meaning of life. Whatever the subject matter is which an artist chooses, however strong or weak his artistic form, he cannot help but betray by his style his own ultimate concern, as well as that of his group and his period. He cannot escape religion even if he rejects religion; for religion is the state of being ultimately concerned. And in every style the ultimate concern of a human group or period is manifest. It is one of the most fascinating tasks to decipher the religious meaning of styles of the past such as the archaic, the classic, the naturalistic, and to discover that the same characteristics which one discovered in an artistic creation can also be found in the literature, philosophy, and morals of a period.

The deciphering of a style is an art in itself and, like every art, is a matter of daring and risk. Styles have been contrasted with each other in several respects. If one looks at the series of styles in the visual arts in Western history after the beginnings of a Christian art in catacombs and basilicas, one is overwhelmed by its richness and variety: The Byzantine, the Romanesque, the early and late Gothic styles precede the Renaissance in which the early and the high Renaissance styles must be distinguished. Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo, Classicism, Romanticism. Naturalism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Surrealism lead to the contemporary non-representative style. Each of them says something about the period in which they were flourishing. In each of them a self-interpretation of man is indicated, although in most cases the artists were not aware of such interpretation. Sometimes they knew what they expressed. And sometimes philosophers and art

critics made them aware of it. What then are the keys which aid in deciphering the meaning of these styles?

In a famous analysis of philosophical styles, the German philosopher, Dilthey, distinguished subjective idealism, objective idealism, and realism. In this way he gave four stylistic keys which can immediately be applied to the visual arts: idealistic, realistic, subjective, objective. Every work of art contains elements of all four, but is under the predominance of one or more of them. When in the beginning of this century the predominance of the classicist style was broken and the aesthetic value of the Gothic style became visible, other keys were discovered. And with the rise of expressionism the fundamental contrast of the imitating and the expressive element became decisive for the analysis of many past and present styles, especially for the understanding of primitive art. Further, one can distinguish monumental and idyllic, particularizing and abstracting, organic and inorganic stylistic elements. Finally one can point to the continuous struggle between academic and revolutionary tendencies in artistic creation. It would be a useless schematization if one tried to arrange these elements into an embracing system. But one thing must be said about all of them: They are never completely absent in any particular work of art. This is impossible because the structure of a work of art as a work of art demands the presence of all elements which provide the keys for the deciphering of a style. Since a work of art is the work of an artist, the subjective element is always present. Since he uses materials found in ordinarily encountered reality, the imitating element is unavoidable. Since he comes from a tradition and cannot escape it even if he revolts against it, an academic element is always present. Since he transforms reality by the very fact that he creates a work of art, an idealistic element is effective. And if he wants to express an original encounter with reality below its surface, he uses expressive elements. But in the process of artistic creativity some elements are suppressed to a point in which it is difficult to recognize them. Usually it is a combination of stylistic elements the predominance of which divides the styles and makes the analysis of styles fruitful and fascinating.

We must now ask the question: What is the relation of these style-determining elements to religion generally and especially to Protestantism? Are certain styles more able to express religious subject matter than others? Are certain styles essentially religious and others essentially secular? The first answer must be that there is no style which excludes the artistic expression of man's ultimate concern; for the ultimate is not bound to any special form of things or experiences. It is present and may be absent in any situation. But the ways in which it is present are manifold. It can be present indirectly as the hidden ground of a situation. It shines through a landscape or a portrait or a human scene and gives them the depth of meaning. In this way a style in which the imitating element is predominant is religious in substance. And the ultimate is present in experiences in which not only is the reality experienced, but the encounter itself with reality. It is hiddenly present

in the state of being grasped by the power of being and meaning in reality. This gives religious significance to the stylistic element of subjectivity and to styles in which it is predominant. And the ultimate is present in those encounters with reality in which the potential perfection of reality is anticipated and artistically expressed. This shows that a style in which the idealistic element is predominant is religious in substance. And the ultimate is also present in those experiences of reality in which its negative, ugly, and self-destructive side is encountered. It is present as the divine-demonic and judging background of everything that is. This gives the realistic element in artistic styles its religious significance.

These examples could be increased by pointing to the religious significance of the other elements in artistic styles. But instead of doing so, I want to give a special place to the expressive element in a style. For it has a special relation to religion.

First, it must be said generally that there are definite adequacies and inadequacies between style and subject matter. This has the consequence that the preferred material varies with the predominance of one stylistic element or a combination of them, and it gives importance to iconography for the analysis of the meaning of styles. For example, one must look for the adequacy of special stylistic elements in portraits, still-lives, landscapes, human scenes, nude bodies, historical events, etc. We must restrict ourselves to the affinity of the expressive style to religion. It shares the general religious significance of all stylistic elements. But while the others are only indirectly representing the ultimate, the expressive element represents it directly. Of course, it usually does not appear alone in a work of art, and other elements may counterbalance its directly religious potentialities. But in itself it is essentially adequate to express religious meaning directly, both through the medium of secular and through the medium of traditional religious subject matter. The reason for this situation is easy to find. The expressive element in a style implies a radical transformation of the ordinarily encountered reality by using elements of it in a way which does not exist in the ordinarily encountered reality. Expression disrupts the naturally given appearance of things. Certainly, they are united in the artistic form, but not in a way which the imitating or the idealistic or even the realistic element would demand. On the other hand, that which is expressed is not the subjectivity of the artist in the sense of the subjective element which is predominant in impressionism and Romanticism. That which is expressed is the "dimension of depth" in the encountered reality, the ground and abyss in which everything is rooted. This explains two important facts: the dominance of the expressive element in the style of all periods in which great religious art has been created and the directly religious effect of a style which is under the predominance of the expressive element, even if no material from any of the religious traditions is used. If this situation is compared with those periods in which the expressive element was prevented from becoming effective, one finds a definite difference. In styles which were under the control of non-expressive elements, the religious art

deteriorated (as for instance in the last period of Western history) and the secular subject matter was hiding its religious background up to the point in which it became unrecognizable. Therefore, the rediscovery of the expressive element in the art since about 1900 is a decisive event for the relation of religion and the visual arts. It has made religious art again possible.

This does not mean that we already have a great religious art. We have it neither in terms of general religious art nor in terms of artistic creations suitable for devotional purposes. An exception to this judgment is recent church architecture in which a new beginning has been made permitting high expectations for future development. And architecture is the basic artistic expression, just because it is not only art but because it serves a practical purpose. It is quite probable that the renewal of religious art will start in co-operation with architecture.

If we look at painting and sculpture, we find that under the predominance of the expressive style in the last fifty years, the attempts to recreate religious art has led mostly to a rediscovery of the symbols in which the negativity of man's predicament is expressed: The symbol of the Cross has become the subject matter of many works of art — often in the style which is represented by Picasso's "Guernica." Other symbols, such as resurrection, have not yet found any adequate artistic representation, and so it is with the other traditional "symbols of glory." This is the Protestant element in the present situation: No premature solutions should be tried, rather, the human situation in its conflicts should be expressed courageously. If it is expressed, it is already transcended: He who can bear and express his finitude shows that somehow he participates in infinity. He who can bear and express guilt shows that he already knows about "acceptance-in-spite-of." He who can bear and express meaninglessness shows that he experiences meaning within his desert of meaninglessness.

The predominance of the expressive style in contemporary art is a chance for the rebirth of religious art. Not each of the varieties of this style is equally adequate to express religious symbols. But most of them definitely are. Whether and to what degree the artists (and the churches) will use this opportunity cannot be anticipated. It is partly dependent on the destiny of the traditional religious symbols themselves in their development during the next decades. The only thing we can do is to keep ourselves open for a new rise of religious art through the expressive style in the art of today.

Reports and Prophecies in the Literature Of Our Time

STANLEY ROMAINE HOPPER

The poet, according to Heidegger, stands "between the gods and the people. He is one who has been cast out — out into that *Between*, between gods and men. But only and for the first time in this *Between* is it decided, who man is and where he is settling his existence."¹

This is something learned by Heidegger from Hölderlin, for Hölderlin believed in the prophetic mission of the poet. So sacred and committed was the function of the poet that he ventured to proclaim that

. . . it behooves us, under the storms of God Ye poets! with uncovered head to stand. With our own hand to grasp the very lightning-flash Paternal, and to pass, wrapped in song, the divine gift to the people.²

Hölderlin sensed, both as a theological student and subsequently as a citizen of his time, that the conventional structures of belief and meaning were falling away, that the "names for God" were no longer sustaining, and that the classical world-view which hitherto had supported them was already in principle crumbling and dropping away. Therefore his time was a time of dearth — when people were increasingly solitary, estranged and alien in a world which, in a hundred and fifty years, would be bluntly appraised:

This is the dead land
This is the cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.³

No doubt it is this perception which, in part at least, has made Hölderlin attractive to many contemporary men of letters, as well as to an impressive array of philosophical writers — Ernst Cassirer, Martin Heidegger, Erich Przywara, Karl Jaspers, Romano Guardini, to name a few. It is, briefly, that in a time of dearth, such as ours, there must be a few who will venture out from under the husks

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1. "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry." in *Existence and Being* by Martin Heidegger, with an introduction by Werner Brock. London: Vision Press Ltd., 1949, p. 312.
2. "As When on a Holiday", *ibid.*, p. 308.
3. T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men, III", in *Collected Poems, 1909-1935*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936, p. 102.

of former meanings, and go into the "open," there to await in patience and in hope the new names of the gods. Hölderlin felt this was the poet's calling: to penetrate the masks of meaning, to bring their secrets into the open, and there, through the wonder of his working with the word, to name them in their new and healing authenticities. For "poetry is the act of establishing by the word and in the word."⁴

Now, a glance at the titles and themes of the "literature of our time" — from Dostoevsky and Proust, say, to Albert Camus — will confirm one aspect of Hölderlin's view of his task: namely, that the literary artist who is sensitive to the deeper *milieu* in which he works *has*, wittingly or unwittingly, made precisely this journey, this quest for the authentic word. He has experienced since the time of Baudelaire the sense of being "exiled in the imperfect"; he knows himself to be "cast out" from the safety and security of former structures; he becomes a "pilgrim of the absolute": he either reports this condition or seeks (prophesies) the terms of renewal. Dostoevsky's *Letters from the Underworld* reports the arrival in our consciousness of the Underground Man. He is again reported in Camus' *The Rebel* and *The Stranger*. He appears in Sartre's *La Nausée*. It would not be too difficult to trace his lineaments in Kafka's "K," though Kafka's heroes all stand poised (though impotently) upon the margin of a quest. And, as William Barrett has remarked, "if those incoherent creatures of thunder and lightning, William Faulkner's heroes, were to think, they too would exhibit an underground consciousness."⁵

It is a dangerous consciousness. It is in part the "shut-upness" of Job, and in part — "since every act of freedom is an aggression against the void" — the terrible freedom of the collective unconscious protesting blindly in the Hitler movement and other mass phenomena of our time. Certainly this Underground Man is present in D. H. Lawrence's ambivalent "belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect"; and in Aldous Huxley's anti-Puritan reports in his early novels; and, in "The Sleep of Prisoners," Fry properly reports his presence —

O God, are we
To be shut up here in what other men do
And watch ourselves be ground and battered
Into their sins? Let me, dear God, be active
And seem to do right, whatever the damned result.
Let me have some part in what goes on
Or I shall go mad!⁶

Proust's great work, on the other hand, is not primarily a report — though it records with precision and meticulous care the mutations in fortune and social position of certain families of consequence. The title of his work in English

4. As Heidegger has finely said, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

5. William Barrett, *What is Existentialism?*, PR Series #2, *The Parisian Review*, 1947, p. 62.

6. Christopher Fry, *A Sleep of Prisoners*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1951, p. 41.

translation should not betray us into an oversight of its proper theme. For it is a *recherché* — an inquiry into the existential mysteries of memory and time, and a *search*, a seeking again, for the times that are lost; and, while one might feel that its longing succumbs regressively to the pull of the maternal unconscious, its nostalgia for return is shared in part by exiles everywhere and by all those who undertake the journey into themselves.

This way also is dangerous. The theme of the quest is a characteristic of the literature of our time. It is in Céline's *Journey to the End of Night* and in the Joseph cycle of Thomas Mann; it is obvious in Joyce's *Ulysses*, and only a little less obvious in Eliot's Dantesque pilgrimage from the *Waste Land* through *Ash Wednesday* to the *Four Quartets*. But unless these journeys become prophetic — that it, unless they break through the fixation of the eternal return — they fall short of disclosure; they drop like Icarus, or they kneel like Narcissus into the shadow of their exiled flesh, and there, like an isolated flute, pour out as though to the moon, their nostalgic tears into (rhetorical) urns of Gold.⁷

These distinctions are by no means clear. The literature of reporting is a literature which probes the plight of contemporary man, and, whether in protest, rebellion, or baffled chagrin, fetches the consciousness out into the open, making it aware of the limits of the human situation. However, the movement from reports to prophecies is both an indefinable and a presumptuous leap. So we shall do well to move slowly, with a more deliberate glance at certain instances, bearing in mind that when we speak of prophecy today we speak not so much of fore-telling as of forth-telling, that (Christianly speaking) an authentic forth-telling in the world of our time would be such a telling as would move forthrightly into the lost meaning (or the deeper meaning yet to be grasped) of the recapitulatory Event that has already occurred but which must always and repeatedly occur. "Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world." What the literature of our time is seeking, either wittingly or unwittingly, is the word that will clarify (through an essentially dramatic *éclaircissement*) the crux of the human situation.

I

Let us note, provisionally, then, that the more reportorial a literary piece or work may be, the more it impinges upon the human situation understood as "fate"; whereas the more prophetic it becomes of life as possibility and as a Way, the more it probes the meaning of life as "destiny." In this sense *Les Chemins de la Mer* of Francois Mauriac is already entrained (as the French say) toward the exploration of the ways into deliverance and renewal. The *Sonnets to Orpheus* of Rilke is already indicative of praise — praise to the journey of descent and return. *Venus*

7. Paraphrasing Paul Valéry, cf. "Narcisse Parle", in *Album de Vers Anciens*, from *Poètes d'Aujourd'hui*, edited by Ad. van Bever and Paul Léautaud. Paris, Mercure de France, 1929, vol. 3, p. 287. Cf. later version in Paul Valéry, *Poésies*. Paris, Gallimard, 1933. p. 36. The metaphor of the "urns" is omitted, as is also the notion of "exiled flesh".

REPORTS AND PROPHECIES IN THE LITERATURE OF OUR TIME

Observed may remain reportorial; but *The Lady's Not for Burning* is prophetic of affirmation. *The Castle* and *The Trial* and *The Plague* and *Man's Fate* and *The Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are antecedently fate-laden; whereas *Ash Wednesday* is already en route towards the inward destinies of prayer —

"And let my cry come unto Thee."⁸

Against the poetry of Wallace Stevens, for example, the complaint has been lodged that he "has every gift but the dramatic" and that "it is the lack of immediate contact with lives that hurts his poetry more than anything else. . ."⁹ And another critic notes that, despite an initial impression of "richness of verbal imagination," one is struck "by a sort of aridity" when one reads his volume through.¹⁰ The complaints are justified, undoubtedly; but the root of the difficulty lies deeper. The lack "of the dramatic" points to it: the poems hang, like gaudy shells, adorning with their brash decor, the empty halls of former grandeurs and beliefs. The poet reports (in "Connoisseur of Chaos") the recession of these beliefs with a strange placidity:

After all the pretty contrast of life and death
Proves that these opposite things partake of one,
At least that was the theory, when bishop's books
Resolved the world. We cannot go back to that.
The squirming facts exceed the squamous mind,
If one may say so. . .¹¹

And he reports the "Loneliness in Jersey City"—

The steeples are empty and so are the people,
There's nothing whatever to see
Except Polacks that pass in their motors
And play concertinas all night.¹²

And when he reports the cosmic circumstance it is with a paean called "Negation"

Hi! The creator too is blind,
Struggling toward his harmonious whole
.....
Incapable master of all force,
....., overwhelmed
By an afflatus that persists.

8. T. S. Eliot, *Ash Wednesday*. New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1930, p. 29.

9. Randall Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age*. New York: Vintage Books, 1955, p. 128.

10. Edmund Wilson, *The Shores of Light*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Young, 1952, p. 49.

11. *The Collected Poetry of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954, p. 215.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

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The moral follows:

For this, then, we endure brief lives,
The evanescent symmetries
From that meticulous potter's thumb.¹³

The meticulous potter has lost even the dignity of the capital letter; he is obviously but the metaphor of His former Self. Even the reporting is inconsistent unless we suppose the concession to the "potter" to be but an ironic reminiscence of by-gone divinizations: the ironic displacement of which consists in the reversal of the potter's fortunes. Formerly the potter's fingers shaped the worlds and men within them, today the potter himself is closed within the whirl and blind afflatus of the whole. Such reporting hovers: it remains outside the data of its own griefs. Far from going out, like Hölderlin, under the storms of God, there to grasp the lightning-flash of newer vision, and to pass it, wrapped in song, as a divine gift to the people, the poet here becomes "The Man with the Blue Guitar."

Stevens entire view of the poet's function (his "poetics") may be found in the following verses:

They said, "You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are."

The man replied, "Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar."

And they said then, "But play, you must,
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,

A tune upon the blue guitar
Of things exactly as they are."

The balance of the poem (it is a long one) is commentary upon and elaboration of this paradox: that things as they are are changed upon the blue guitar (for they are composed by the "aesthetic" and ordering mind into the forms of their possibilities); and that, to see things as they exactly are, the self must be changed into what it really is. The impotence of the poet as reporter lies here: he holds within his hand the instrument of this magical transformation; he intuitively suspects its power; but he strums it uncertainly and in the abstract, not knowing the rubrics of "eternal life" —

I cannot bring a world quite round,
Although I patch it as I can.
I sing a hero's head, large eye
And bearded bronze, but not a man,
Although I patch him as I can
And reach through him almost to man.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

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This is skillfully drawn, and the poem entire is an adroit display of the poet's skills and his manipulation of the chords of possibility.

He reports once more the time's condition:

Throw away the lights, the definitions,
And say of what you see in the dark
That it is this or that it is that,
But do not use the rotted names.

And with the passing of the gods we are left with the world and ourselves:

A substitute for all the gods:
This self, not that gold self aloft,
Alone, one's shadow magnified,
Lord of the body, looking down . . .
.....
One's self and the mountains of one's land,
Without shadows, without magnificence,
The flesh, the bone, the dirt, the stone.

Against this background two prophetic chords are struck: the first —

So it is to sit and to balance things
To and to and to the point of still . . .

and the second —

..... Poetry
Exceeding music must take the place
Of empty heaven and its hymns, . . .

and this by the way of the blue guitar.

Now it must be noted that the symbol of the "guitar" is recurrent throughout the poetry of Wallace Stevens, and it must be regarded therefore as central to his view of the poet's function. It stands in his poetry very much as guitars and mandolins stand in the early work of Picasso — whose painting it was that precipitated the long meditation from which we have been quoting. It remains thereby, to Stevens, an ambivalent symbol:

Is this picture of Picasso's, this "hoard
Of destructions," a picture of ourselves,
Now, an image of our society . . .¹⁴

On the one hand the symbol of the guitar represents the role which the poet unconsciously wishes to play: it is an easy role, employing the talent *from the outside* side of truth, of self, of meaning, making no inner journey, sitting placidly to the mean of action, avoiding life and ignoring death; but on the other hand, Picasso's picture disturbs him deeply with the sense that, latent in this role, is "the

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 183, 176, 181, 167, 173.

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hoard of destructions" which threatens the unrealistic assumption that poetry can live out of itself and be its own justification. The temptations here are toward magic or idolatry. Only belatedly (in his last poems, called *The Rock*) does Stevens resolve his ambivalence by making this move. The poem becomes an icon, the figuration of blessedness: and through it is the recognition of fruitfulness. The icon is also the man: and the poem and the icon and the man are a "cure of the ground and of ourselves, in the predicate that there is nothing else."¹⁵ This insight is achieved by definition, and not by journey. It remains outside the dynamics of human renewal. So the report remains wistful, like a rumor of glad tidings; and the icon remains hollow, like the box of the blue guitar.

One has only to glance at the Fifth Elegy of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, where Rilke works from another of Picasso's paintings (the *Acrobats*) to grasp the contrast between the poet whose vision is external to the meaning of meaning, and the poet who is immediately at one with the inner toils of our ultimate concern. Rilke, too, had thought of the poet's vocation as like the man with an instrument of strings; but his man was Orpheus, for whom the instrument was not an end in itself, but a means of descent into the antinomies of the known and the unknown, the visible and the invisible, of being and non-being, of life and death, of the conscious and the unconscious.

Let us, however, conclude this preliminary contrast with a poem less well-known: a poem of Cecil Hemley's, in which Eurydice speaks:

If anyone would rescue me,
He must descend into the cold;
He must disdain divinity,
The tideless sea in which I drowned.
If anyone would have me be
As once a lover did of old,
He too must dare absurdity
And walk the dark ways of a wound.
I seek a hero; but no one
Has faith to find me in the night
And bear me upwards to the sun;
I am a name beyond time's fate.
I am a dream that lies unwon
With multitudes who also wait.¹⁶

II

This little poem brings us a full dimension beyond reports such as those of Stevens, or authors generally whose words are at best adornments and diversifications on the rim of meaning. Eurydice (in Jungian terms) may very well be the

15. *Ibid.*, "The Poem as Icon," p. 527.

16. Cecil Hemley, *Twenty Poems*. New York: Voyages, 1956; cf. "Eurydice".

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symbol of our repressed Shadow, or, for that matter, of the Unconscious itself. What is particularly striking is its appeal to the absurd journey — "He too must dare absurdity, And walk the dark ways of a wound."

The appeal to the absurd has appeared in a variety of forms in the literature of our time — specifically so in the novels of Sartre and Camus, not to say Kafka. The ironic consciousness also bears witness to it.

In Camus, it is the myth of Sisyphus which sums the nature of the absurd. Like Sisyphus rolling the stone to the top of the hill only to be overborne by its burden, so man's long history of toil and daily tasks seems merely to return from day to day from age to age to the starting point: whence we begin again the absurd attempt to push the burden of consciousness over the hill of meaning.¹⁷

Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir recounts the tale of Pyrrhus and Cinéas (as told by Plutarch). "First we shall conquer the Greeks," said Pyrrhus. "And after that?" asked Cinéas. "Then we shall win over Africa." "And after Africa?" "We shall pass into Asia and conquer Asia Minor and Arabia." "And after that?" "We will go to the Indies." "And after the Indies?" "Ah!" replied Pyrrhus, "then I shall rest." "Then," said Cinéas, "why don't you rest now?"¹⁸

In both instances the absurdity of human behavior (and thereby of the human condition) is made plain. Life itself is absurd if it comes to that, particularly when I consider that, do what I will, turn right, turn left, push the stone or leave it alone, conquer Africa or take my ease now — whatever course I pursue, death awaits me sooner or later. "We all go into the dark," as Eliot says.

Nevertheless, the absurdity, while existentially omnipresent, is logically transparent. To detach myself from the condition, and to stand outside the predicament, as it were, is a logical achievement, and poses the category of the absurd. But to do so breaks the line by which I am *attached* to the other, and deprives me of my movement toward the other. If I do so I become exiled from the reality; I become a Stranger (*L'Etranger*), a wanderer, a stone pushing a stone, a thing among things, floating in a dream-like indifference to feeling, to value, to concern, to fatality, to life or death. That is why we see in existentialist novels heroes (or, at any rate, protagonists) who are either sinking back into the daily round, the "quotidian indigence," or are moving dialectically to that nadir of contradiction from which they may be wakened into awareness of "responsibility" (destiny). Otherwise they lapse into thinghood — like Kafka's hero of "The Metamorphosis" who awakes one morning to discover he has turned into a cockroach. That Kafka himself is infected with this debilitation of the absurd is evident from his comment on himself: "What will be my fate as a writer is very simple. . . I waver, continually fly to the summit of the mountain, but then fall back in a moment. Others waver

17. Cf. Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Paris: Gallimard, 1942, p. 165f.

18. Simone de Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*. Paris: Gallimard, 1944, p. 9f.

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too. . . . But I waver on the heights; it is not death, alas, but the eternal torments of the dying."¹⁹ This is the Sisyphus movement reporting its own fatality.

Simone de Beauvoir, however, points out the illogic of this logical pose: man is not first of all a thing, but spontaneity which desires, loves, wills, and acts. He is possibility already projected toward the future; a possibility which actualizes itself precisely through recognizing what it is there where it commits itself.²⁰ Pyrrhus was right, at any rate, to the extent that he recognized that every end is at the same time a fresh point of departure. This is the ambiguity of the human estate, and the root of human freedom. Camus also, recognizing with Kafka that men today are estranged from reality and from themselves, seeks to take this condition as the fulchrum for his narratives, and, without petitioning the *Deus ex machina*, to see in what sense the dialectic of the absurd contains within itself the power of its own transformation and how the report from the outside may be made prophetic of new meanings and fresh recognitions.

What this fulchrum is Camus sets forth quite clearly in his essay on Kafka, who has so deeply influenced him (along with Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Pascal). "The final attempt of the surveyor (in the *Castle*)," he notes, "is to find God by traversing that which denies Him, to recognize Him, not according to our categories of goodness and beauty, but behind the empty and hideous faces of His indifference, His injustice and His hatred." And he notes how the existentialist novelists and philosophers, who begin by turning directly towards the Absurd and its manifestations, come out "with this immense cry of hope."²¹ Our failure to achieve honesty and candor (authenticity) in this regard has led us to project structures of regulation by which to "order" our lives. We have followed these out into the desert "of stones, fogs, and stagnant waters" (*The Fall*) where we find ourselves today.

The Stranger presents the plight of such an exile. Since the years had become unreal to him, events could make no difference — neither the deaths of others, nor a mother's love, nor the death of the priest's God, nor the way a man chooses to live. With a revolver in his hand Mersault reflects: "it crossed my mind that one might fire, or not fire — and it would come to absolutely the same thing." Again, a little further on: "To stay, or to make a move—it came to much the same thing."²² His mother dies, he has an affair with a girl the next day, he shoots a man in self-defense (and is absurdly condemned for murder), and the whole tragi-comic pantomime is played out like a dream — until finally death, and the cross-questionings of the prison chaplain, trip him into passionate rebellion,

19. *Diaries: 1914-1923*, ed. by Max Brod, tr. by Martin Greenberg and Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1949, p. 77.

20. *Op. cit.*, pp. 16, 29.

21. *Op. cit.*, pp. 183, 185.

22. Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, tr. by Stuart Gilbert. New York: Vintage Books, 1954, pp. 152, 72, 73.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 153-4.

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Then, I don't know how it was, but something seemed to break inside me, and I started yelling at the top of my voice. . . I'd taken him by the neckband of his cassock, and in a sort of ecstasy of joy and rage, I poured out on him all the thoughts that had been simmering in my brain. . . . And what did that mean? That, all the time, I'd been waiting for this present moment, for that dawn, tommorrow's or another day's, which was to justify me. Nothing had the least importance, and I knew quite well why. He, too, knew why. From the dark horizon of my future a sort of slow, persistent breeze had been blowing toward me, all my life long, from the years that were to come. And on its way that breeze *had leveled out all the ideas that people tried to foist on me* [italics mine] in the equally unreal years I then was living through. . .

The "dark wind" from the future seems to be the fate-laden awareness of ever-impending death indifferent to human hopes and values, thereby reducing all claims to an indifferent level. And then he fell asleep. But when he awoke, and "the stars were shining down on my face," a "marvellous peace of the sleepbound summer night flooded through [him] like a tide," and he understood, suddenly, his Mother's sense of freedom at her life's end.

And I, too, felt ready to start life all over again. It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and, gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe.²³

The aesthetic strategy of this conclusion is not unlike that of Francois Mauriac, whose narratives frequently end with the hero's turn into the open, with the new and emergent life implied by way of symbols drawn from nature or from psychological symbolization. Both writers, it should be recalled, have Pascal in common; and both, since October of this year, are recipients of the Nobel award in literature.

But does the resemblance end here? Mauriac's report on the human condition presupposes the Christian dogma of Original Sin; whereas Camus merely says "we all carry within us our places of exile, our crimes and our ravages. But our task is not to unleash them on the world; it is to fight them in ourselves and in others."²⁴ Yet in Camus there is a peculiar victory: as though Mauriac's dogmatic structure is inimical to the deepest authenticity, interposing, so to speak, a patterned orthodoxy between his reader and the truth; whereas Camus, reporting with a candid acceptance, the wilderness turnings of contemporary man, emerges with a prophetic openness (albeit "an empty prophet for shabby times," an "Elijah without a messiah"²⁵) preparing the way for the new name of God.

24. Albert Camus, *The Rebel, An Essay on Man in Revolt*, foreword by Sir Herbert Read, tr. by Anthony Bower. New York: Vintage Books, 1956, p. ix.

25. Albert Camus, *The Fall*, tr. by Justin O'Brien. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957, p. 117.

III

Clearly we cannot resolve so complex a matter in so brief a review. We may, however, note that the problem is at the root of all our deepest concerns today, and further, that it is at the heart of and comprises the greatness of contemporary literature. Even Camus, when fascinated with Sisyphus' return to the stone, would find in this return a positive principle. He finds it in the fact that we know our condition, a consciousness to which we are led when the stone rolls down the mountain (when our distresses are too heavy to bear), and when we win our victories over the absurd in the respirations of the night. ("Il n'y a pas de soleil sans ombre, et il faut connaître la nuit.") And he adds (with an absurd leap of his metaphors) that "these are our nights of Gethsemane."²⁶ Herein is betrayed what is *naturaliter* Christian in Camus: for the nights of Gethsemane forecast the bearing of another burden up another hill by another Man. It is significant that Camus' reflections on the human predicament move from *The Rebel* to *The Fall*.

In *The Rebel* Camus proclaims that the time of rebellion through which we are passing presents a radical change in the nature of revolt. We are experiencing a metaphysical revolt, "the revolt of man against the conditions of life, against creation itself."²⁷ In it we are contesting the ends of man and of creation. But it is a compound protest, against the refusal of man to be what he is, against his handing over his need to become freely what he is to tyrants who will order his life for him by way of the mass extermination of those who stand in the way, against the failure of historical Christianity to give an answer to the problem of evil (postponing "to a point beyond the span of history the cure of evil and murder"²⁸), and against the temptation to reproduce the husks of thought instead of probing the dichotomies of our inner experience. "Even in Faulkner, a great writer of this generation, the interior monologue only reproduces the outer husks of thought."²⁹

One feels, nevertheless, that the purview of *The Rebel* is ambivalent. Camus recognizes that "The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadow, the divinity abandoned its traditional privileges and drank to the last drop, despair included, the agony of death."³⁰ It is the power of this event that seems secretly to inform the protest of the contemporary rebel, and permits Camus to assert that "at this moment when at last a man is born, it is time to forsake our age and its adolescent furies" and to recognize that "all of us, among the ruins, are preparing a renaissance beyond the limits of nihilism. But few of us know it."³¹ On the other hand, the real strength of Christianity was compromised long since by the Church's having "placed the emphasis on history to the detriment of nature" — which increased the claims of the temporal power, accelerated the dyna-

26. *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, pp. 167, 166.

27. *Op. cit.*, p. viii.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 265n.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 306, 305.

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misms of history, and left the created orders as nothing more than open prey for actions aimed merely at transforming them.³²

These themes achieve their synthesis in *The Fall*, a work of fiction which will easily rank with the finest literary works of our time. The concatenation of the themes — the casual encounter of judge and client: the ironic progression from the heart of things, the city Amsterdam, the last circle of Dante's hell (the concentric canals resemble the circles of hell), through the Limbo of neutral angels where we lack both the energy of good and of evil, to the ironic Dutch heaven of "the Last Judgment"; the theft of the painting of "the Just Judges"; the traumatic incident on the bridge where the Judge might have risked his life to save another, but didn't; the ironic emergence of Jean-Baptiste Clamance as the John the Baptist of the Gospel of our Fall; and the ironic denouncement in which the reader, having been led to the point of an inverted revelation, is revealed to himself repeating once more his failure to risk his life for truth and true being instead of perennially knuckling to "a master, God being out of style."³³ — and the integration of its plot (irony raised to the *n*th power of denial of the traditional view of the Cross): these proclaim the skill and relevance of its master craftsmanship.

The reader will hardly gain from such a summary any adequate notion of the novel's movement. Yet it is plain that we are moving here on a far deeper and far richer terrain of implication than could be found within the work of Wallace Stevens. The reporting of the human condition has here passed over into negative prophecy — into a negative disclosure, that is, of the *nature* of our predicament.

This is apparent, first of all, in the pedagogical intent of the work of art. Camus' poem — his concatenated plot — is no icon. It is, as de Rougemont has remarked,³⁴ "a trap, a calculated trap" in which to catch the reader: Jean-Baptiste explains himself. He begins by accusing himself, which leads his clients to accuse themselves. With the dialogue thus instituted he constructs "a portrait which is the image of all and no one. A mask, in short, rather like those carnival masks which are both lifelike and stylized. . . ." When the portrait is finished, he holds it out to his client, saying, "This, alas, is what I am!" And then he remarks, by way of explanation, "But at the same time the portrait I hold out to my contemporaries becomes a mirror."³⁵ This is an ironic denouement, leading the reader into the abyss of his own antinomies, derivative and attached as these may be to the antinomies of his age.

But the antinomies of our age, as herein revealed, derive from the absence of God, and from the ironic disclosure that we are all of us somehow implicated in the crime. *The Fall* is an explication of our guilt: "every man testifies to the guilt of all

32. *Ibid.*, p. 299

33. *The Fall*, p. 133

34. Denis de Rougemont, "Religion and the Mission of the Artist", in *Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Stanley Romaine Hopper. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957, p. 177.

35. *The Fall*, p. 140.

the others."³⁶ The loss of Eden consists in thrusting intermediaries between life and ourselves. Religions generally have misunderstood this. They have converted their own proclamations into systems of mediation, thereby compounding the Fall and driving the wedge between life and ourselves that much deeper. Religion fabricates (like art) another world in which the self escapes by abdication of its task — the recovery of its own integrity in the open *telos* of its calling. Its Way is the Way that is *beyond irony*, beyond the irony even of its own masks, let alone the complex carnival of artificial (not to say artifactual) grins and grimaces which compose patterns of posture and approval behind which the great majority of men play out the artificial roles imposed upon them. *The Waste Land* also ends, as Philip Wheelwright has recently noted, with a succession of masks, prominent amongst which is Hieronymo's cry, in which he confesses to play-acting. Upon which Wheelwright comments: "But the confession of play-acting is itself a bit of play-acting, and therefore should not be taken with unguarded assurance. The relation of the poet-protagonist to his masks, as of the doer to his situations, is never fully resolved" (in this poem).³⁷ Such are the involutions of our predicament, from which the poet-protagonist of *The Fall* is not exempt either.

IV

To go beyond irony is not easy. Yet, when irony has reached the postulation of its own existential antinomies, it can no longer maintain its position of prophetic negation outside the predicament. It must bring to a close its "career as a false prophet crying in the wilderness and refusing to come forth"³⁸ in order to avoid becoming the clown of itself. It may choose the way of the priest or of the icon or of dogma (but, for Camus, these also are the ways in which we drive the wedge betwixt ourselves and reality); or it may choose the journey into the depth of its own antinomies, into humility, into the mysteries of reconciliation.

Most of our ironists (Huxley, Orwell, Mann, Sartre, Camus, Kafka, Auden, Eliot, etc) actually effect some blend or amalgam of these possible alternatives, once the precarious cerebral perch outside the predicament has become untenable; and each must be perused with thoroughness and care before one ventures to say "Thou ailest here, and here," and also because we know that even in our deepest journeyings we are followed by the shadow of our own ambivalences. The principle that is here invoked is the principle of Pascal: the defective or excessive aim evokes its own contraries and, followed far enough, the extremes will meet. It is instructive to see how this is true in Camus who refuses dogma and in Auden who espouses it.

Both Camus and Auden are centrally influenced by Pascal and Kierkegaard and Kafka. Both are driven upon the Fall, and both report the absurd dimension in the human lot and probe the mystery of murder. For both, the Christ symbol emerges where the contradictions meet. For Camus, "historical Christianity post-

36. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

37. Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954, p. 342.

38. *The Fall*, p. 147.

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pones to a point beyond the span of history the cure of evil and murder, which are nevertheless experienced within the span of history."³⁹ Therein historical Christianity has erred, has betrayed, indeed, the meaning of the plain event:

Believe me [his protagonist argues in *The Fall*], religions are on the wrong track the moment they moralize and fulminate commandments. God is not needed to create guilt or to punish. Our fellow men suffice, aided by ourselves. . . . God's sole usefulness would be to guarantee innocence, and I am inclined to see religion as a huge laundering venture — as it was once but briefly, for exactly three years, and it wasn't called religion. . . . People naturally tried to get some help from his death. After all, it was a stroke of genius to tell us: "You're not a very pretty sight, that's certain. Well, we won't go into the details! We'll just liquidate it all at once, on the cross!" But too many people now climb onto the cross merely to be seen from a greater distance, even if they have to trample somewhat on the one who has been there so long. . . . They have hoisted him onto a judge's bench, in the secret of their hearts, and they smite, they judge above all, they judge in his name. He spoke softly to the adulteress: "Neither do I condemn thee!" but that doesn't matter; they condemn without absolving anyone. In the name of the Lord, here is what you deserve. Lord? He, my friend, didn't expect so much. He simply wanted to be loved, nothing more. Of course, there are those who love him, even among Christians. But they are not numerous. . . .

Then follows the crucial irony:

He had foreseen that too; he had a sense of humor. Peter, you know, the coward, Peter denied him: "I know not the man . . . I know not what thou sayest . . . etc." Really, he went too far! And my friend makes a play on words: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." Irony could go no further, don't you think? But no, they still triumph! "You see, he had said it." He had said it indeed. . . .⁴⁰

Thus Camus protests against the irony of two millenia in which the historical Church has imposed a supernatural pattern upon the open social murder of the innocent man ("he was not superhuman, you can take my word for it"). Thus we not only deprive the event of its existential virtue, but, by placing it within the context of our own projected system, we protect ourselves against the recognition of our own complicity and procreate the murder of each upon all precisely where our unreal aims collide. There innocence, openness, and hope are crucified.

Auden's poem, *Vespers*,⁴¹ states the same. Yet it is less a proclamation, less an argument. It is more like a report. Its "shock of recognition" reaches far more

39. *The Rebel*, p. 303.

40. *The Fall*, pp. 110-116

41. In *The Shield of Achilles* by W. H. Auden. New York: Random House, 1955, pp. 77-80.

deeply into that abyss of the inner antinomies there to work the aesthetic mysteries of purification and self-identification. It begins with "the hill overlooking our city [which] has always been known as Adam's Grave" — and already our *polis*, the human community is set between the Adam symbol and the "hill" (which suggests Golgotha, the place of the skull). It is the hour of twilight, between Sun and Moon, when "All must wear their own faces. . . . And it is now that our two paths cross."

Both simultaneously recognize his Anti-type: "that I am an Arcadian, that he is a Utopian." Follows then a rehearsal of these opposites — "He notes, with contempt, my Aquarian belly: I note, with alarm, his Scorpion's mouth, etc." — until the initial escapist motifs are qualified toward their Biblical counterparts:

You can see, then, why, between my Eden and his New Jerusalem, no treaty is negotiable.

The hostile appraisal continues:

In my Eden a person who likes Bellini has the good manners not to get born: In his New Jerusalem a person who dislikes work will be very sorry he was born.

In my Eden we have a few beam-engines, etc. . . .

until we reach the resolution. Here everything counts, and draws the opposites, with fine inevitability, into the *noeud* where *les extrêmes se touchent*:

Was it (as it must look to any god of cross-roads) simply a fortuitous intersection of life-paths, loyal to different fibs,

or also a rendezvous between accomplices who, in spite of themselves, cannot resist meeting

to remind the other (do both, at bottom, desire truth?) of that half of their secret which he would most like to forget,

forcing us both, for a fraction of a second, to remember our victim (but for him I could forget the blood, but for me he could forget the innocence)

on whose immolation (call him Abel, Remus, whom you will, it is one Sin Offering) arcadians, utopias, our dear old bag of a democracy, are alike founded:

For without a cement of blood (it must be human, it must be innocent) no secular wall will safely stand.

Thus the argument from the Absurd, which begins in Camus and moves toward murder, is here recapitulated in terms which force the reader upon the central Christian event (though it is not mentioned) by the fortuitous but inevitable encounter of existential opposites. Without the central sacrifice, both Eden and the New Jerusalem are wish-projections which deceive the soul and then avenge themselves on others or turn in destructively upon the self; but with the sacrifice, both

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Eden and the New Jerusalem are one, combining in the opening of the soul in the continuing event of its becoming. Clearly we are far from the poem as the healing icon: the poem here is functioning as parable.

For, given Man, by birth, by education,
Imago Dei who forgot his station,
The self-made creature who himself unmakes,
The only creature ever made who fakes,
With no more nature in his loving smile
Than in his theories of a natural style,
What but tall tales, the luck of verbal playing,
Can trick his lying nature into saying
That love, or truth in any serious sense,
Like orthodoxy, is a reticence.⁴²

V

It may be objected, and justly so, that this solution is at once too logical and too arbitrary, that the transition from irony to dogma is an intellectual achievement, and that (as in a witticism or poetic conceit) it is the intellectual part that makes the identifying leap: and consequently we remain on the outside of the human predicament. Just as irony and wit and the metaphysical conceit represent the oversophistication of the aesthetic sense, does not substantialist theology represent the oversophistication of the historical manifestation of the Christ as reported in the Scriptures? Does not Auden's alliance between the two deprive his verse of that miraculous property of Rilke's lines whereby they move, as on running springs, into eternity? Does not the scaffolding of dogma, which supports his probing paradoxes, mask the deeper desire of his perceiving mind to unite with the deeper ground of Being whereby the rhetorical *coincidentia oppositorum* might be lived and translated into fact? These are questions which, of course, we may not answer; but they will serve to dramatize the remaining perspective on the literature of our time. "Poets are the first in their time," Carl Jung has written, "to divine the darkly moving, mysterious currents, and to express them according to the limits of their capacity in more or less speaking symbols. They make known, like true prophets, the deep motions of the collective unconscious, 'the will of God' . . . which, in the course of time, must inevitably come to the surface as a general phenomenon."⁴³

Here is that dimension of depth which, under the circumstance of the universal impoverishment of symbols through which our culture is passing, must become the pathway of our knowing. The artist has been thrown back upon himself; he "cannot express himself without confessing."⁴⁴ Theologians, too, are beginning to recognize the need to renew their symbols from within, and to explore that dimensionless

42. "The Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning", *ibid*, p. 46.

43. Jung

44. Otto Rank, *Art and the Artist*. New York: Tudor Publishing Company, no date, p. 390.

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land that lies, "in the height and in the depth, in the length and in the breadth of the spirit."⁴⁵ It is here that art and religion may meet, retrieve the deeper meanings, and transform each other.

While there are striking instances of this prophetic mode in modern poetry (such as *The Second Coming* of William Butler Yeats), the most impressive "achievement" is that of T. S. Eliot. What is striking about the early ironies — *Prufrock*, *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* — is that, behind their ruthless indictment of the spiritual aridity of contemporary times, they appealed to the myth-consciousness behind the emptiness. The masks were torn off both our individual and collective pretense. Our patterns and culture-sanctified routines were shown up in their hollowness. Yet the counterpoint of constructive appeal is to the myth consciousness. The wind of the spirit (*ruach*) begins to blow at the end of *The Waste Land* (lines 419-22); the devouring myth is superbly drawn in Part II of *Ash Wednesday*; the mythical method throws the poet back upon himself:

Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet
Under sleep, where all the waters meet.⁴⁶

Dante becomes a prototype, and the archetypal themes appear. In *Ash Wednesday* the "deep center" is found —

And the light shone in darkness and
Against the World the unstilled world still whirled
About the center of the silent Word —⁴⁷

only to flower into the composite *mandala* symbols of the *Four Quartets*.

It has been noted recently⁴⁸ that the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels follow this progression. He requires the separation from the *persona*, from the Pharisaic appeal to the religion of outer forms; he insists on the "break" with family and ancestors (separation from the *participation mystique*); the "unclean spirits" also must be expelled and the spirit be made whole — "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The Holy Spirit is essential to this wholeness, more so than Christ: it is the one blasphemy that cannot be forgiven, for its rejection is the rejection of the very principle of life. The "deep center" of the Gospels is the Kingdom of Heaven which is within, and which, like the pinch of leaven, soon transforms the whole lump. But very shortly this was altered:

In place of the deep center, the Kingdom of Heaven as Jesus proclaimed it, is put the figure of Jesus himself, the crucified and risen Christ. As a transforming symbol this is immensely potent. . . . But the image of the crucified and risen Christ led directly into a well-beaten archetypal

45. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, with introductory commentary and tr. by Ira Progoff. New York: The Julian Press, 1957, pp. xxxviii, 1, 149.

46. "Marina" in *Collected Poems*, p. 132.

47. *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

48. P. W. Martin, *Experiment in Depth*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1955, pp. 191f.

REPORTS AND PROPHECIES IN THE LITERATURE OF OUR TIME

track, back to an ancient myth: the hero-saviour who does the great deed, Osiris, Zagreus, Tammuz, Attis, Adonis, Balder — the dying and resurrecting Gods.

From this substitution gradually evolves a fundamental change in doctrine. Instead of a man seeking the Kingdom of Heaven . . . he is told that the work is done. He had been "redeemed" by the "blood", etc. . . .⁴⁹

Each doctrinal formula has its useful integrative aspect, "but each has also an archetypal, magical meaning. Belief is sufficient. Unconditional acceptance is all that is required. The hero-saviour does the rest."⁵⁰ This externalization of integrating faith is the beginning of those appeals to tyrannical beliefs which have led, in our time, to totalitarian claims (as Camus also points out in *The Rebel*).

This shift from faith to belief helps us to understand why Eliot's espousal of doctrine reacts upon his synthesis — "perhaps the most fully pertinent single poem of our moment in history"⁵¹ — in such a way as to enervate the whole. As one acute observer remarks, "the work of two of the most significant writers of our day — T. S. Eliot and James Joyce — is saturated with nostalgia for the myth of eternal repetition and, in the last analysis, for the abolition of time."⁵² The turning point, it seems to me, is plain in the superb third movement of "East Coker," where our movement into the darkness opens up a way of return:

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theater,
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on darkness,
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama
And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away —
Or, as when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between
stations
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen
Leaving only growing terror of nothing to think about;
Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing —
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.⁵³

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-4.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Philip Wheelwright, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

52. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. New York: Pantheon Books, Bollingen Series XLVI, 1954, p. 153.

53. "East Coker, III", in T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943, p. 14-15.

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We move from our existential darkness into Jung's "Night Sea Journey" (the train is more Freudian, and has reached the surface in "The Dry Salvages"), and into the Heraclitean "deep center" of the dancing stillness. But the next verses lead us into the "negative way" of Saint John of the Cross and his Dark Night of the Soul.

This, in itself, has much to commend it; but it reopens the door to the traditional substantialist theology, with its time-eternity Hellenic equation and its suppression of history. It helps to account for the inadequacies in Eliot's drama, and for the tendency of the *Four Quartets* to become an icon instead of a parable. What begins as a journey into individuation returns regressively to the protective stasis of the doctrines instead of the radical renewals of faith. Yet the poem remains "perhaps the most fully pertinent single poem of our moment in history."

Could it be that Camus has this fundamental argument in mind when he urged that the Church erred when it "placed the emphasis on history to the detriment of nature?"⁵⁴ Did he mean that the supernaturalist "history" committed the strange oversight of its primary authenticity? If so, it would help one to understand his claim that art restores us to existence in the orders of nature. "One can reject all history and yet accept the world of the sea and of the stars."⁵⁵ This would be true if he could mean it as Job meant it. In this renewal of the numinous is the beginning of wisdom. In it one might come to see behind the absurdity of things the miracle of things. He might come to know that "night of eternal blossoming" of which Rilke spoke. Or, more simply, he might begin where he is, like the Chaplain in *The Lady's not for Burning* (he also played a viol):

... everything astonishes me,
My self most of all. When I think of myself
I can scarcely believe my senses. But there it is,
All my friends tell me I actually exist
And by an act of faith I have come to believe them.⁵⁶

Or, purged by the blaze of this time's fiery furnace, in an age when much that was weighed is found wanting, we might arise to prophecy:

Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.⁵⁷

54. *The Rebel*, p. 299.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 276.

56. Christopher Fry, *The Lady's not for Burning*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1950, p. 41.

57. *A Sleep of Prisoners*, pp. 47-8.

The Arts and the Christian Evangel

TOM F. DRIVER

It is an indispensable characteristic of the Church that it should seek to bear witness to the truth of which it is the steward. It is the natural reaction of the non-Church world that it should resent the arrogance which it sees in the claim of such stewardship. The fact of Christianity therefore necessitates an uneasy confrontation between the testimony of faith and the assertions of culture.

It is my purpose to ask: within this confrontation, as it occurs or should occur, in our day, what is the role of the arts?

Professor Hendrik Kraemer has spoken of the "new and complex nature" of the modern world.¹ He has drawn attention to the emergence of what Professor Hoekendyk of Holland has called "the Fourth Man." This is the modern type who has succeeded his predecessor, "Bourgeois Man." He is similar to David Riesman's "radar type man." He has, says Professor Kraemer,

no longer any stamina for personal decision, a faculty in man to which the existing evangelism automatically appeals. [Professor Hoekendyk] urges that this fiction of personal decision should be dropped, and a new group method should be sought in evangelism. . . . The Church today lives in a secularized and disintegrated mass society, which is unusually dynamic. It behaves, however, in many respects, as if it still lived in the old stable and parochial world.²

The new and complex nature of the world, not often explicitly recognized, is, however, intuited by everyone who watches network TV, buys an assembly-line automobile, shops in a supermarket, or receives his reading matter from a book club. The characteristic movement of the day is toward de-personalization and away from all types of immediacy. Food is frozen and entertainment is packaged on celluloid, devices by which even time, which is the very mode of freedom, is reduced to a commodity.

If these facts have produced a crisis in the mode of confrontation between Christianity and the world, they are also fundamental to the current revival of interest in the arts; for the arts hold the promise of immediacy, without denying the social nature of man.

In the arts the individual and the collective are conjoined. When a work of art strikes home, it appeals to one's inner locus of freedom and spontaneity, a primary source of that joy which is the hallmark of artistic appreciation. John F. Danby, in his discussion of nature in Shakespeare, has emphasized the artist's reticence to encroach upon the free response which is expected of the reader:

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¹ *The Communication of the Christian Faith*. Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1956, p. 108.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 113.

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The relation between reader and writer in all art that touches the universal is a relationship therefore of complete equality and freedom. . . . The reader is free to accompany, to reconsider, to accept or reject; but he has no sense of compulsion from the writer's design on his allegiances. Universal art illuminates choice and activates it. It would frustrate itself by any intention to dictate choice.²

It should be noted, along with what Professor Danby has to say about freedom, that his remarks indicate that the arts carry more-than-personal meanings. The intention of art is communication — that is to say, the experience of community through participation in common symbols. The artist is on the one hand anonymous, directing attention to the situation he wishes the viewer to enter; and on the other hand the artist is highly personal, establishing a bond between himself and the viewer by virtue of the fact that through the work of art they are able to share a common approach to an objective reality. For this reason, the arts offer a hope of overcoming that intolerable modern dichotomy in which the personal is divorced from the communal, a condition wherein the truly individual fights a losing battle for survival.

If man is addressed only in his capacity for personal decision, too much is assumed in regard to his own powers and too little in regard to the forces which play upon him. The popular variants of that approach today are escape into "peace of mind" and individualistic "evangelism" which engineers a "decision for Christ" quite apart from social responsibilities.

If a man is addressed only through his social situation, there is danger of reaching him only on the levels on which he is a "political animal" or a digit in society. The popular variant of that approach today is the appeal to man as the "family animal," urging Christianity upon him simply because, in his "togetherness," he is a husband and a father.

Neither the personal approach nor the social approach, each at its best, is entirely wrong; but the paramount need is to address man in his conception of himself and of the universe he inhabits. It is essential to know what he looks like in the eyes of his own imagination, what is his hidden anthropology — as well as the corollary of that, his image of his cosmic setting. And it is essential not only to know these things but to be able to enter into them in order that the Christian gospel may be proclaimed in the native language of the twentieth-century man.

The arts are life-defining images. Amos Wilder has expressed the idea clearly:

We realize better today that society lives by its myths, its favorite symbols; these are not idle or interchangeable. The Cross is not interchangeable with the Crescent or Lotus. The Cross is one thing, and the Swastika is another. The Sheaf of Wheat is one thing, and the Fascis is another. The "Battle Hymn of the Republic" is one thing, and the "Internationale" is another. The Lincoln Memorial is one thing, and the tomb of Lenin is another.

² John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*. London, Faber & Faber, 1949, p. 223.

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Society lives by its symbols, and society represents a battleground of competing symbols. Sometimes they battle to the death. They signify sometimes a devitalizing stalemate within a family or nation of incompatible loyalties and banners: in France, the French Revolution and Catholic order; in our Southern states, ancient nostalgias and a genuine agrarian humanism; each with their evocative emblems.⁴

It might be said that the aim of every artist is to discover the image or form which defines his life and his world as he knows them. Likewise, the search of those who look at art is to find the image which corresponds to their idea of self and world. When Edward G. Robinson's art collection was sold, Robinson spoke of the quality he, as a collector, had sought in paintings:

. . . stillness, but not the stillness of death. It's more like the world going around so fast and so perfectly even, you don't notice it.⁵

Such an image expresses something of the viewer's life ideal, in which is resolved the paradox of stability and change. It is a powerful image, for the search of many today is for an equilibrium in a universe which is said to be furiously expanding in every direction. It is a search for what, on the psychological level, Arthur Laurents has called "a clearing in the woods."

In the so-called Age of Faith, it could be assumed that the artistic images which defined one's life were those built upon Christian symbols. The Blue Virgin at Chartres is at once an artistic triumph (considered purely aesthetically) and also a definition of the central reality in the believing Catholic's experience. The believer was related to the window not only by the attraction of beauty, but also in terms of a basic orientation to space, time, and vocation. The task of the Church today, in bearing witness to the revelation entrusted to it, is linked to the continuing search for modern equivalents for such earlier life-defining images built upon the symbols of the faith.

The Christian faith is not communicated except in terms of symbol. Paul Tillich, especially, has made us aware of the symbolic nature of all language and particularly religious language and liturgical forms.⁶ To quote again from Professor Kraemer:

Part of the difficulty of the communication of the gospel in our day is the unawareness of the Church of the fact that the Christian message is highly charged with symbolic connotations. . . .⁷

It is necessary for the Church to recognize clearly the symbolic nature of its language and liturgical forms if its own particular symbols are to come into adequate relation with those symbols by means of which the artists of our time are seeking to discover the forms which correspond to meaningful life.

⁴ "The Church's New Concern with the Arts", *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XVII, No. 2 (February 18, 1957), p. 14.

⁵ *New York Times*, February 26, 1957.

⁶ See "Theology and Symbolism" in *Religious Symbolism*, ed. by F. Ernest Johnson. New York, Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1955, pp. 107-116.

⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 77.

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The emphasis upon symbol in religion and art is also necessary in order to protect the Church from the error of attempting to exploit the arts for propagandistic purposes. Symbols have life and vitality of their own. They participate, to use Tillich's word, in the reality which they symbolize. They also participate in the life of the community which shares them. They can never be handled arbitrarily. The Church must resist the temptation to use art as a vehicle for conveying religious subject matter. It should perceive that artistic forms may in themselves be the closest human approximation to ultimate realities.

For these reasons, where the arts are concerned, the encounter between the Christian faith and other types of faith means: 1) coming into relationship with living symbols and forms by means of which the culture is attempting to understand itself and its situation, and 2) the search for new forms in which is to be expressed the encounter between the artistic forms of the culture and the symbols of the Divine Mercy in Christ.

"The encounter of the Gospel with the world," says a statement adopted for study by the Department of Worship and the Arts, National Council of Churches,

whether in evangelism, education, apologetic or theology requires a deep appreciation of and initiation into the varied symbolic expressions of the culture. It is in such expression at all levels that the moral and spiritual life of the age discloses itself. . . . This first aspect of our involvement with the arts has to do then with their significance as indices and symptoms.⁸

It is not only the fine arts which reveal the life of the times, but also the various forms of mass culture. A film such as *The Ten Commandments* reveals much about the religious taste of the populace. Here is exposed its love of the spectacular, its confusion of the sensational and the sensitive, its romantic type of hero-worship, its tendency to reduce all human relations to the love-triangle, its naive, literalistic theology, and its unrealistic conception of history. Professor Tillich has suggested that to compare the photographs of Charleton Heston as Moses with the celebrated statute by Michelangelo is to observe the religious vacuity of our day. Exactly the same descent of popular taste is to be observed in popular religious "art." The sentimentalized, emasculated, super-humanized (and therefore de-humanized) Jesus who often appears is thoroughly domesticated, and therefore quite incapable of bearing an ultimate revelation.

Fortunately, it is possible to point to examples of better contemporary art which demonstrate that in some quarters Christian sensitivity is not dead and can be vitally joined to the various images of suffering and threat which characterize this century. The religious art of Georges Rouault, to take a celebrated example, is proof that it is possible to combine the element of distortion and suffering with the mystery of Divine love.

⁸ "The Church, the Arts, and Contemporary Culture", Department of Worship and the Arts, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., New York, 1955.

Much modern art is an attempt to state not so much the distortions of contemporary life as its discontinuities. This intention is first seen clearly in the Cubist movement. Earlier, when Cezanne had abandoned the Impressionist's interest in surfaces in order to probe to essences, he had achieved a gigantic sense of harmony and unity. The world of Cezanne is solid, standing in its own strength. But the Cubists, led by Braque and Picasso, taking up certain techniques of Cezanne and others, achieved a view of reality in which broken surfaces reveal broken essences. Life is viewed in many planes, and it is only in the rarest instances that artists of this school unite the planes in such a way as that the subject is felt to be one. The drift is analytic rather than synthetic. Most modern art of the past forty years could thus be called analytic. The style is parallel to the analytic spirit in psychology and nuclear physics. Reality is fragmented: motivations of behavior are hidden, and the chain of cause and effect is mysteriously broken. In this respect modern art is at variance with, perhaps in rebellion against, the popular assumptions of a technological society; but it is at one with the spirit which such a society generates.

Similar themes occur in the drama. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is built upon the theme of dissociation. For Blanche DuBois, past and present are pathetically dissociated. She is what the psychologists call a schizophrenic type, at home neither with herself nor with reality. Unfortunately, reality itself is dissociated as much as she. The junky street on which her sister Stella lives is known as Elysian Fields. The "blue piano" which is heard in the background throughout the play is an incongruity. In Stanley Kowalski, sexual passion is divorced from every humane touch of gentility. There is no harmony between man and environment, nor between man and man. The most powerful theme in the contemporary theater is that of the impossibility of communication. It goes without saying that even such a spirit of dissociation can produce works of art with genuine beauty; but it is true, I believe, that they are accompanied by a sorrow born of omnipresent disunity.

The arts disclose the situation which the Christian gospel must address. They also serve the Church's proclamation of that gospel by making conscious in persons the situation in which they are standing, but which, without the artist, they but vaguely comprehend.

In addition to expressing the quality of contemporary life, the arts today are beginning again to take their place as one of the forms of witness to the Divine Mercy in Christ.

The prerequisite of such a development is that the Church shall recognize the validity of nonverbal forms of witness. Obviously the arts are not verbal statements about Christian belief. Neither are they translations of verbal statements into another medium. The arts are visions of states of being. Their function is to move others into a state of being corresponding to their vision. For this reason, their relation to

theology and dogma is always less clear than is that of preaching and discursive literature.⁹

To come to terms with the arts, therefore, the Church must be willing to adopt a nonverbal language. The nature of this language is that it moves *parallel* to the Divine realities it seeks to communicate, rather than moving *from* them deductively, as in philosophical theology, or *toward* them hortatorily, as in the sermon.¹⁰ Artistic symbols are related to reality through analogy and allegory. Minds which cannot think on two planes at once cannot appreciate art; for the arts never say, they suggest. Recently, I believe, the Church has begun to become aware, in some circles for the first time since the Reformation, that the language of the arts is indispensable to the communication of some dimensions of the Christian faith which can be apprehended only through allegory and analogy.

I wish to mention two kinds of witness which the arts bear in our day, the first being what Pastor Exbrayat has called "negative witness."¹¹ As an example, one may take Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. This play is a carefully worked out image of life in which the alternatives are Death and Illusion. Although the style appears to be realism, the play actually reveals the tendency in contemporary drama (also observable in Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, not to mention Strindberg and even Ibsen) to move from simple realism toward mythical statements. Both *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* are ordered interpretations of human existence, and they are diametrically opposed to Christian faith. As such, however, they are of immense importance to the evangelistic task today. O'Neill has been able to express his romance with death in the most powerful terms. He has raised the issue of Life and Death more sharply than the Church has raised it for a long time. He has given new pertinence to St. Paul's assertion that we fight not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. He therefore establishes an arena in which the evangelistic task may be undertaken, and he presents the Church with the challenge of being as relevant and powerful in its witness as he is in his. Here is a prime example of "negative witness."

"Positive witness" is born of the artist's desire to celebrate the facts of Christian existence as they have become meaningful to him. In the nature of the case, "positive witness" utilizes the traditional symbols of the Christian faith, for new symbols would mean a new religion. But the traditional symbols have to come into

* This situation is true of the drama as well as the graphic and plastic arts. A drama is not an imitation of ideas, concepts, or propositions; but imitation of action. It therefore celebrates fact or a vision of reality and seeks to adopt its viewer into a certain state of being, as does a picture or a statue. That its vision is one of action rather than static composition is important, but does not change the fact that its mode is imitative like the arts, rather than hortatory like preaching or logically compelling like philosophy.

¹⁰ I use the word sermon here as shorthand. Not all sermons are hortatory by any means; but all of them, quite rightly, tend to compel the listener. What is said above concerning nonverbal language will apply also in part to poetry.

¹¹ See Malcolm Boyd, *Crisis in Communication*. Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1957, p. 67.

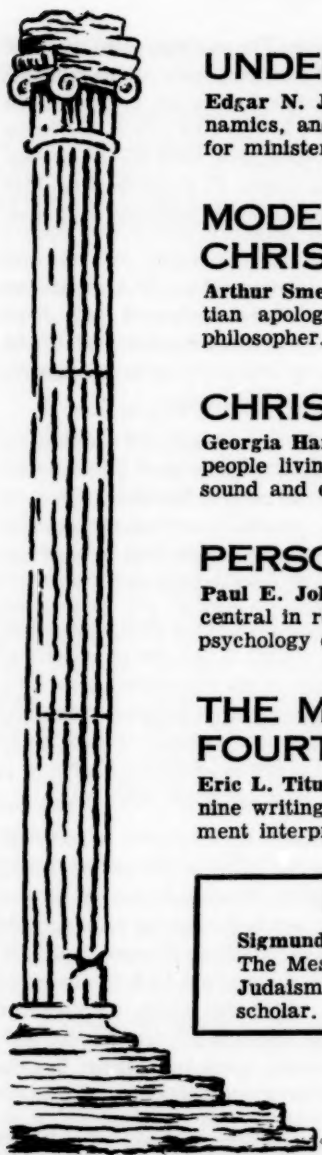
vital relationship with the acceptable forms of the time. The problem is to discover new forms for old forms. In the theater, the greatest contemporary attempt in this regard is that of T. S. Eliot. Though not entirely successful, he has certainly seen the problem correctly. All work for the theater from *The Rock* to *The Confidential Clerk* has been a search for a form which would accommodate both the traditional symbols of Christian faith and also the patterns and shapes of experience familiar to theater-goers of our time. Such a search is to be paralleled in painting, sculpture, and architecture.

If it should be that the symbols of Christian devotion could not find compelling expression in the artistic forms of our day, the Christian faith would show itself incapable of speaking to this age. Such a failure would reflect the fact that Christ is not incarnate for our generation. The struggle to achieve a contemporaneous religious artistic form reveals the difficulty of the Divine incarnation.

There is among students and some teachers at the present time an openness to Christianity approached in and through the arts greater than that through any other avenue. Although this fact could be interpreted as mere dilettantism, I believe it actually shows an appreciation for the Church's potential relevance to modern life, together with a universal search for a transcendent meaning which in turn can give meaning to all the lesser forms encountered in human experience.

At any rate, there is no doubt that the arts themselves are widely appreciated at the moment. The sale of classical records and paperback books, the popularity of museums, the nation-wide interest in theater (in spite of its concentration in New York), the popularity of ballet and opera — all demonstrate an interest in the arts greater than ever before in this country. The phenomenon is surely related to the nation's peace and prosperity and cannot be expected to last indefinitely. Rather, it is a transient opportunity which should be developed to its greatest potential.

In such a situation the Christian mentality needs to be very alert to meet the student mind where it is. It needs to be sensitive to the forms which are attracting people and to the meaning expressed through those forms. It needs to subject its own faith to expression in contemporary modes. In other words it needs to be concerned to enter into the cultural situation for the sake of redemption. It must avoid the temptation to exploit art for its own ends, just as it must avoid such ill-conceived programs for reform of the arts as would destroy in them that which is most alive. The desire of the Church should be that through the union of Christ with our cultural situation there should emerge a new creation. No spirit is welcome but the spirit of love, which labors in order that in the realm of the human imagination it may not be said that Christ has died in vain.



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Two Experiments in Correlation

The Field of Religion and Art at Chicago

PRESTON ROBERTS

The humanities have at long last found their way into the heart of a Protestant theological curriculum. For almost a decade now the Federated Theological Faculty at the University of Chicago has been developing a new field of graduate study leading to the Ph.D. as well as the B. D. and M.A. degrees in the general area of Religion and Art, or what the three of us who are now teaching full time in the field also call "faith and culture" or "theology and the humanities."

The aim of this new field concerned with imaginative literature and the arts is to encourage theological students to think about theology and the humanities together rather than apart in order that their understanding of each may be deepened, and in such a way that the problems of faith and the issues of culture may be seen at all times as related and as in tension. More specifically, the purpose of the field is to provide a solid kind of training and more adequate credentials for students who wish to teach in departments of religion with a concern for the way religion has at once informed and been informed by culture or in departments of literature and art with a concern for the religious aspects of their subject.

This novel program in theology and the humanities was called into existence by and continues to owe its life to our faculty's unique philosophy of theological education. As such, it illustrates our general concern to relate faith and culture and to conjoin older and newer disciplines. The social sciences and the humanities, no less than Bible, Church history, and theology, are conceived as being dimensions of the Christian faith and as essential ways of understanding that faith. The novelty of this program, therefore, does not consist so much in the various subject matters and disciplines involved as it does in the seriousness of the spirit or attitude with which they are being entertained and considered. The real novelty resides in the attempt to conceive of the humanities as a living part of the Christian faith and as one of the theologically disciplined ways of apprehending and interpreting that faith.

Although the field has been in existence for less than a decade and continues to be the only experiment of its kind or at least of its magnitude in this country, it is now recognized to be an essential and permanent part of our total undertaking as a theological faculty. A basic sequence of two courses in the field (or its equivalent) is required of most of our students, as an integral part of their general education in theology, whether they are working at the B. D. or the Ph.D. levels and whether they intend to enter the teaching or the pastoral forms of the Christian ministry; about twenty advanced courses in the area are being offered each year; and approximately fifty students are enrolled in its various degree programs.

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The Ph.D. program in the field is specifically designed to enable our students to teach effectively in a department of religion, an English department, or a humanities program setting. In the first place, they have to take courses and pass comprehensive examinations in each of the eight fields in our curriculum: Bible, Church history, history of Christian thought, constructive theology (including philosophy of religion), history of non-Christian religions, ethics and society, religion and personality, and religion and art. This means that they are given a basic theological training in both the older and the newer disciplines. In the second place, they are required to pass a special field examination in Religion and Art which is designed to test three things: their initial mastery of various subjects in the field like theology of culture, aesthetics, intellectual and cultural history, art and art criticism, literature and literary criticism, and myth, symbol, and ritual; their final mastery of one subject in the area (normally literature and literary criticism); and their capacity to express the philosophical and theological presuppositions involved in their general understanding of the relation between faith and culture.

The first course in the basic sequence is concerned primarily with close literary analysis and careful theological interpretation of individual plays, novels, and poems in their concreteness. The particular texts assigned are drawn from as many different periods in our Western literary tradition as is possible within the compass of a single course — Hellenic Greek, Elizabethan, Neoclassic, Romantic, Victorian, and Modern. They are chosen also to represent some of the classic expressions of each of the three great stories which would appear to have informed and shaped that tradition — the Greek story, with its emphasis upon what is so profoundly tragic about human existence; the Christian story, with its stress upon what is not just tragic but also redemptive or more than tragic in life; and the Modern story, with its concern for what is more largely pathetic or less than tragic and for the most part beyond rescue in experience. Although the emphasis in this first course is upon close reading and practical religious criticism of individual works of literature, the precise nature of "theological criticism" as a special kind of literary criticism and the powers and limitations characteristic of different ways of going about it are considered very briefly at the beginning, and the idea of a distinctively Christian "poetics" or theory of literature is developed at somewhat greater length and more systematically at the end. A Christian assessment of certain very recent developments in literature since the end of the second World War also is attempted. When "time's winged chariot" is sufficiently kind to permit it, the following texts are among those considered: Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*; Shakespeare, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*; Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*; Melville, *Billy Budd*; Dostoevsky, *The Brother Karamazov*; Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*; Miller, *Death of a Salesman*; Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*; Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Old man and the Sea*; Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* and "The Bear"; Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *The Cocktail Party*; Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*; and Anderson, *Tea and Sympathy*.

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The intent of the second course is to orient the student toward the main issues and tendencies in modern criticism, so that his efforts to define his own identity as a Christian reader may be informed by an intelligent awareness of the legacy in criticism that is generally available in the contemporary period. It is primarily upon developments in modern poetics since the early work of Hulme and Eliot and Richards that stress is laid, but some attention is given to earlier phases of the critical tradition as well. These are considered principally in terms of the kinds of adjustment that the custodians of the literary imagination have made to the dominance of the scientific spirit over the modern mind since the seventeenth century. Hobbes, Dryden, and Johnson are viewed as the chief representatives of Neoclassical rationalism and are used in such a way as to define the background against which the great strategists of Romanticism (and particularly Coleridge) were in reaction. Finally, a consideration of Matthew Arnold affords a natural bridge from the past to the immediate present, for Arnold's problem — which was essentially the problem of the Romantic generations before him — is regarded as having been that of somehow vindicating the imagination against the imperialistic claims of modern scientific positivism. And it is argued that this has been a principal concern of many of the leading theorists of our own day, particularly among those who have been affiliated with the "New Criticism." Of the major contemporary movements, this school receives most attention, but it is related to other schools and movements (for example, the new Aristotelianism and its main representatives are considered in relation to independent figures like Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling. An attempt also is made to indicate the special perspectives that are to be brought to bear upon the contemporary discussion by the critic who functions in relation to a Christian theological orientation. And the course concludes with a consideration of the achievement of certain leading Christian critics of the present time (for example, Amos Wilder and Martin Jarrett-Kerr) and with an analysis of some of the general issues that their work presents to the Christian theorist. Here the aim is to move explicitly in the direction of a systematic formulation of a distinctively Christian understanding of the critic's task.

In addition to offering the basic sequence, the field is in a position to offer a rather large and highly varied set of advanced courses as well. Although the central focus of John Hayward's teaching and research has been gradually shifting away from his earlier and most promising work in the religious dimensions of visual art, he will nevertheless continue to offer a number of courses in the history of Western painting. In terms of subject matter, these courses begin as far back as Greek art (the Parthenon sculptures) and Byzantine art (the mosaics at San Vitale in Ravenna), proceed to the Renaissance (Masaccio's Brancacci frescoes and Michelangelo's Sistine frescoes), the Reformation (Dürer woodcuts and engravings and Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece), and the Baroque (El Greco oils and Rembrandt paintings and etchings), and end with selected works by the great heroes of the modern artistic imagination (Goya, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Matisse, Klee, Picasso, and Rouault). In terms of method they combine close formal analysis of visual

composition and technique with a more symbolic reading whereby the works are also interpreted as being causes or exemplifications of certain major religious and cultural attitudes, movements, styles, or motifs. However, Mr. Hayward's most significant course offerings in the immediate future are more likely to reflect a return to his first love (i.e., philosophical theology) and will be given over to the development of a distinctively Protestant understanding of the relation between Christian faith and cultural expression in general. In these courses a study will be undertaken, on the one hand, of certain classical and modern theologies of culture (e.g., Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Schleiermacher, Tillich, H. R. Niebuhr, and Bultmann) and, on the other, of representative philosophical aesthetics and theories of art (e.g., Hegel, Santayana, Croce, Whitehead, Dewey, Maritain, Cassirer, Urban, Langer, Herbert Read, André Malraux, and Roger Fry). Since the ultimate concern of these courses will be to arrive at a fairly systematic definition of the interrelations between *kerygma*, imagination (myth and art), and knowledge, they will be listed jointly in the fields of Theology and Religion and Art. At the same time, Mr. Hayward will also continue to offer the three courses in myth which constitute his real claim to fame in these parts. The first of these deals with the specific bodies of myth which have gone into the making of our Western religious and cultural tradition (Greek, Hebraic, and Christian); the second compares and contrasts the very different theories of myth which have been entertained by modern philosophers and theologians; and the third, on "Myth and the Christian Faith," attempts to formulate a more adequate Christian doctrine or theory of myth in light of our present religious and cultural situation, with particular reference to the strengths and weaknesses of Bultmann's now famous but still highly controversial thesis about this whole matter.

Nathan Scott's courses tend to focus upon the literature and criticism of the modern period, from the last of the Victorians to the present, and represent an attempt to bring a Christian theological perspective to bear upon the image or vision of man which has been characteristic of this period. For example, his course on "Vicissitudes of Belief in the Modern Novel" attempts to reconsider the oft-discussed problem in modern criticism of "Literature and Belief." But it does so, not just in systematic or theoretical terms alone, but also and more largely in an empirical fashion, by way of an examination of some of the relations between "art" and "belief" that are discernible in the thought of certain representative writers in the modern period. The six patterns studied are as follows: Franz Kafka and the agony of belief; D. H. Lawrence and the politics of belief; E. M. Forster and the modest belief; Graham Greene and the tyranny of belief; George Orwell and the rejection of belief; and Richard Wright and the contemporary search for belief. Similarly, his course on the "Religious and Philosophical Presuppositions of Recent Literary Criticism" attempts to review the theoretical doctrines and the critical practice of certain focal figures in the criticism of the modern period. Although the chief emphasis is placed upon the work of such leading representatives of the "New Criticism" as I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, John Crowe Ransom, Yvor Winters,

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Cleanth Brooks, and Allen Tate, other schools and movements in modern criticism are also considered, such as the New Humanism, Marxist and Freudian criticism, and Neo-Aristotelianism. Special attention is paid to the religious and philosophical presuppositions of this body of literature. Mr. Scott also gives a very fine reading course in "The Literature of Recent Christian Criticism" wherein the achievement of Christian critics in the modern period is assessed by reference to the degree to which they have successfully come to terms with the major issues of modern literary theory and criticism. The work of such Anglican and Protestant critics as Eliot, Jarrett-Kerr, Bethell, Every, De Rougemont, and Wilder and of such Roman Catholic critics as Maritain, Turnell, Wimsatt, and Tate is studied. The first of his two more systematic or theoretical courses on "Integrative Questions in Theology and Literary Theory" attempts to study literary art under the aspect of three spheres of its relationship to culture (literature and belief; and social functions and responsibilities of literature; and literature and morality) in which the literary theorist and the theologian of culture may be expected to take an equal interest, since they involve, at bottom, the root question concerning the relationship of the aesthetic object to those non-aesthetic values that constitute the environment within which literary art is produced and appreciated. The analysis of these issues also involves consideration of the meaning of poetic "autonomy" and, finally, of the revelatory power and significance of poetry and art in general. The second, on "The Language of Poetry and the Language of Religion," reviews the recent attempts on the part of certain literary critics, philosophers, and theologians to re-vindicate the non-scientific and expressive uses of language in the face of the extreme disparagement of the language of poetry and the language of religion which has been characteristic of modern analytic philosophy, still the dominant philosophic movement of our day. The work of such philosophers as Ayer and Morris and Carnap and the early Richard forms the background of discussion; considerable attention is given to such representative theorists in recent poetics as Owen Barfield, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, and John Crowe Ransom; and the work of Christian philosophers like Urban and Bevan and Niebuhr and Tillich, who have been concerned from the standpoint of religion with problems of language and symbolism, is also studied. But Mr. Scott's most intriguing course, to my mind, is entitled "The Comic Imagination and the Christian Faith." Through a close examination of selected works, this course attempts to assess the nature of the testimony about existence afforded by the comic imagination and to determine its bearing upon the Christian understanding of the human condition. In addition to such comic writers as Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Moliere, Sterne, Shaw, and Joyce Cary, considerable attention also is given to such theorists of the comic as Baudelaire, Meredith, Bergson, Niebuhr, and Auden. Since many of our students tend to go around with a pretty long face after taking the basic sequence, where the sense of life expressed by many of the texts is rather grim and where the organizing principle is more largely "the tragic imagination and the Christian faith," this course should provide a much-needed corrective.

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Most of my advanced courses tend to focus upon the works of individual figures of unquestioned stature (e.g., the Greek tragedians, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Melville, Dostoevski, Henry James, Hemingway, Faulkner, Eliot, and Auden) and represent an attempt to make Christian reassessments of their achievement. But I have also developed two more systematic courses, "Approaches to Theological Criticism" and "The Idea of a Christian Poetics." The first of these attempts to compare and contrast the emphasis in Aristotle's *Poetics* upon a work of literature as being a fairly literal and direct imitation of serious human actions, organized and presented by means of a patterned sequence of dramatic incidents or plot, with the more Platonic stress in the *Dialogues* and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* upon a work of literature as being also and more largely a highly symbolic and terribly oblique expression of certain ultimate meanings or truths which are conveyed or rendered through the use of poetic symbols. The very different understandings of the critic's task which follow from these contrasting theories of what a work of literature really is and does are carefully developed, with particular reference to the contemporary debate between the New Critics and the Neo-Aristotelians in this country, in Canada, and in England. But the ultimate concern of the course is to show that this classic issue in "secular" criticism may also explain and account for at least some of the disagreements which continue to arise between and among Christian critics as well. The second course attempts to formulate a more adequate Christian answer to some of the very difficult problems which contemporary poets and novelists are facing as they try to move beyond the pathos, the doubt, and the despair which have been so characteristic of much modern literature, but without just losing or betraying the religious meaning and power which have been no less characteristic of modern literature at its best in the process of doing so. On the one hand, it tries to show that a more adequate Christian method or strategy for dealing with these problems is not likely to be found unless Christian critics begin to take ancient Greek insights into man's finitude and uniquely modern insights into his sickness, as well as classically Christian insights into his spiritual pride, much more seriously than many of them have been inclined thus far to do. On the other, it is argued that a more adequate Christian answer also will not be forthcoming until Christian critics bring the Catholic and the Protestant, as well as the orthodox and the humanistic, understandings of the Christian story itself into a more positive relationship of tension with each other than has been characteristic of many efforts to formulate a distinctively Christian doctrine on theory of literature in the past.

In order that this account may not be all "sweetness and light," let me refer very briefly to what we consider to be the field's major item of unfinished business here at the end by way of a conclusion. As our official title suggests and the early appointment of Mr. Hayward illustrated, the field of Religion and Art was originally conceived as being wider than just religion and literature. From the beginning, it was meant to include at least one of the non-verbal arts as well. Nor can the wisdom of this original commitment be seriously questioned. We need only re-

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mind ourselves of the perennial inability of Protestantism to take anything more concrete than the written or spoken word in dead earnest. But, thus far at least, the field has failed to make good on this larger vision. This failure does not mean that our work in literature will ever become any less necessary and important than it now is. It simply means that our work in literature, however solid, can never be quite sufficient. A new appointment in visual art or music should therefore be forthcoming in the not too far distant future if the field is to remain true to this wider and deeper understanding of its total vocation or calling.

Department of Worship and the Arts

MARVIN HALVERSON

The nature of the report gives it a practical character and directs it to the churches and the immediate needs of the churches. The constituency of The Christian Scholar is perhaps interested in other facets of the Department's significance, some of which are implied in this document. Perhaps the outstanding achievement of the Department of Worship and the Arts in its brief history is the enlistment on its Commissions of some of the most distinguished persons in the arts throughout the country. The roster of the membership of the Department's Commissions on art, architecture, literature, drama and music, suggests that through this Department, a link has been established with persons never before brought into direct conversation with the Church. Their readiness to explore areas of mutual concern and their eagerness to serve makes it all the more dismaying that through lack of funds the enormous potential cannot be more quickly developed.

Among discerning observers of American culture there is a growing concern over the mounting disproportion between technology and the sciences on the one hand and the humanities and the arts on the other. Even in the churches there has been preoccupation with the technical and social sciences and neglect of the humanities and the arts. On all levels of American life, however, the arts are receiving new attention. It is true of the churches, as well, for the significance of the arts for the life and work of the churches and for the health of society was recognized and clearly set forth in the study document "The Church, the Arts, and Contemporary Culture" prepared by the Department of Worship and the Arts and adopted by the Executive Board of the Division of Christian Life and Work on October 4, 1955. This statement recognizes that

The Church has accepted responsibility in social issues. A corresponding responsibility falls upon it in the field of man's imaginative and intuitive life. If this obligation has been overlooked, it can be only because a frivolous view of the arts and of the whole domain of the imagination has prevailed. The fateful cleavage between reason and emotion, sense and sensibility, the practical and the spiritual order, has consigned the arts in the

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minds of many to a marginal and decorative or sentimental role. . . . Fortunately, the arts at their best have now for some decades sought to repossess the lost territory and to reassert the claim of the imagination over the whole man and the whole of life.

The Gospel concerns the whole man and man as he is conditioned by the structures of his social, economic, and cultural life. Therefore, it is important that the Church be receptive to all vital movements in the arts today. For much of modern literature and art represents a momentous struggle in the modern soul to recover depth and wholeness, to reaffirm personal responsibility in the face of dehumanization, to find a true order beneath our modern anarchy, a true ground for human freedom and creativeness in a culture marked by impersonal tyrannies, and so to prepare the way for renewed human community. But the arts, the support of which by the churches this document suggests is crucial, "cannot be confined to the arts in any narrow sense but must involve the wider problems having to do with the symbols and values of our society and the vehicles of communication."

In fact, the problem of communication in the arts cannot be separated from the problem of communication for the Church. Worship of the Church, or the liturgy, once shaped a common language. If we are to recover or discover a common language which will overcome the present confusion of tongues there must be a renewal of worship. For worship is the heart of the Church's life and the crucible in which common symbols of communication arise and receive form. The Department of Worship and the Arts assumes that worship is central to the life and work as well as the faith and order of the Church. For worship is not restricted to the sanctuary since it involves our common life and work in the vocation with which every Christian is called. Rightly understood, the vocation of the Church to witness to the world in social action cannot be effective apart from grounding in worship. For worship is not a "religious experience" so much as it is an act of the people of God in which it is recognized that our daily work is an aspect of our worship of God which is summed up in the corporate worship of the Church.

Thus the ways in which we worship as corporate communities of Christians are supremely important. The Department, through its Commission on Ways of Worship, does not seek to mold worship of the different churches into a common pattern, but rather to help churches, ministers, and laymen to see their own riches as well as the wealth of traditions other than their own. Out of that knowledge and in awareness of the present situation, fresh meaning and renewed integrity can be manifested, the basic unity of the Church perceived, and new forms emerge.

The Department's work is developed through six Commissions on architecture, art, drama, music, literature, and ways of worship, which were organized in 1954. During the past three years these Commissions have met once a year. Committees within each of the Commissions have been at work on long range studies as well as projects of immediate practicality.

Basic to all specific projects have been the Commission meetings in which professional persons of national repute in the arts have sat down with theologians

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and pastors almost for the first time in American Protestantism to deal with fundamental issues and relationships. As a consequence there has not only been a mutual growth in understanding but persons in the arts have had an opportunity to see their vocation in religious terms and ministers have obtained a larger conception of the Church's task in our culture.

Comprehensive bibliographies in the arts as related to religion have been prepared through the Commissions for the use of Commission members and college and theological seminary professors and students and parish ministers. After years of need for such a service, for instance, the Commission on Drama prepared an annotated bibliography entitled *Plays for the Church*. The enthusiastic reception this publication has received since it appeared in the summer of 1957 testifies to the competence and thoroughness of the project, and the need which it is meeting in local churches throughout the country. Bibliographies have been developed also for architecture, literature, and music.

One of the Department's major responsibilities is to acquaint ministers and laymen with a heritage in art which has been neglected and ignored. At its first meeting three years ago, the Commission on Art decided that the best works of art dealing with the Christ should be brought to the attention of the churches and the general public. Accordingly, a committee of leading art scholars and a theologian (Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Chairman of the Department's Commission on Art and the following Commission members: Perry T. Rathbone, George H. Hamilton, Charles Rufus Morey and Paul J. Tillich) was appointed to prepare such a list. The project attracted the attention of the publisher and the editors of *Life* who made arrangements with the Department to have it incorporated into the Christianity issue of *Life*, December 1955. The reproductions and the cover selected by the Department's committee of art experts was the dominant single feature of *Life's* coverage of Christianity.

The Associated Press and numerous religious journals seek the Department's counsel in preparing features of art. Although its work in many of these instances has been anonymous, the Department's influence has been extensive and significant.

The Department's Commission on Architecture has initiated discussion of basic issues such as the religious significance of good design and the relationship between the Christian faith, ways of worship, and the vocation of the Church in the world to architecture. As a consequence several issues of the leading professional architectural journals reflect the influence and advice of the Department.

The symposium in the December 1955 issue of *The Architectural Forum* on theology and architecture involving Professor Paul Tillich, vice-chairman of the Department of Worship and the Arts, members of the Commission on Architecture, and the Department's Executive Director; the December 1955 issue of *The Architectural Record* dealing with Worship and the Arts; and the December 1956 issue of *The Architectural Record* containing an extensive article, "On Getting Good Archi-

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ture for the Church," by the Department's Executive Director; and the volume *Religious Buildings Today*, all reflect the influence and participation of the Department in the leading architectural conferences and publications.

In April 1956 the Department of Worship and the Arts announced the results of a poll of its Commission on Architecture which was conducted to determine what, in the opinion of the members of the Commission, were the outstanding religious buildings erected during the previous twenty-five years. The eighteen buildings most frequently listed out of a total of seventy-two buildings nominated were widely pictured and discussed not only in architectural journals but in the secular and religious press throughout the United States and Canada.

The Department has sought to encourage local churches to make use of living artists in the building and in its parish life and worship. As a pilot project, the Department, together with Central Congregational Church, Providence, Rhode Island, jointly commissioned a young American poet, James Schevill, to write a play on Roger Williams. Designed to express a local Church's concern with living drama, the project had its setting in a six-week Lenten program of lectures by leading members of the Department's Commissions, supplemented by discussion groups on different levels in the Church. "The Bloody Tenet," the play commissioned in this joint experiment, has entered into the repertory of Church and theater groups. It has been published in *Religious Drama I*, the first volume of a religious drama paperback series edited by the Executive Director of the Department.

In the realm of music the Department has embarked on a varied program of encouraging the composition of new music. Commissioned jointly by the Department and Berea College, an hour and a half length oratorio by Norman Lockwood, "Children of God," treats the Biblical basis of brotherhood. Apart from its thematic timelessness, this choral work is designed for the concert hall as well as the Church building, for the Commission is convinced that the Church's musical voice should be extended into radio, television, and the concert hall. During 1957 the Department and the National Methodist Student Movement joined in commissioning an oratorio on the Wesleys entitled "The Invisible Fire." Another project already completed involves the Department with three Churches in different parts of the country: Westminster Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, N. Y.; Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minn.; and Plymouth Congregational Church, Des Moines, Iowa.

"The Church Organ," a definitive analysis of appropriate musical instruments in the churches, represents extended and considered deliberation by leading organists and Church musicians, and is a token of the many ways in which the Department gathers up the most competent opinion and experience for the benefit of the churches. Although not yet published, one of the most significant activities of the Department and its Commissions has been the extensive work by a committee of distinguished musicians (with Luther Noss, head of Yale University School of Music and Master of Silliman College as Chairman) on a paperback hymnal designed to include the best hymns of the different traditions.

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Five sub-committees are at work also.

1. The Committee on the Christian Year hopes to present recommendations to the Commission on Ways of Worship with respect to the calendar of the Christian year which is printed annually in the Yearbook of American Churches. This calendar, is descriptive of what the churches do with respect to the Church year, rather than a pattern which is considered normative for all Christian bodies.

2. A Committee on Weddings and Funerals has been appointed in response to numerous requests for guidance in these services which are often the occasion of invasion of the Church's worship by the world. Made up of representatives of the major denominations, this committee will work closely with a corresponding committee in the Commission on Music.

3. The Committee on Architecture and Music, a sub-committee of the Commission on Architecture, consists of representatives of the Commissions on Ways of Worship, Architecture, and Music, together with acoustical experts and representatives of the organ building industry. The architectural profession has been seeking assistance from the churches in understanding what are the acoustical requirements of a building designed for Protestant worship which involves *both* preaching and singing with musical accompaniment.

4. The Committee on Illustrative Material and Design in the Churches, a sub-committee of the Commission on Art, has assembled examples of illustrative material, art, posters, Sunday Service bulletins, magazine covers and other instances of art in the churches in the effort to assess the state of the arts among us. This material will be analyzed by experts in design with the expectation that out of this analysis and discussion will come an understanding of what positive steps can be taken by the churches to improve their visual presentation of the Gospel to the world.

5. The fifth committee is a study group on censorship which at the moment is related to the Commission on Literature. At the first meeting of that Commission, several members, among whom are numbered the leading literary critics and educators of the country, dwelt on the serious decline in standards of popular literature and the general debasement of taste in published materials. Their concern over these matters arose at a time when the National Council is being asked for information by local councils of churches which are under pressure to join with local NODL (National Organization for Decent Literature) chapters and other bodies in acts of censorship. Accordingly, the Associate General Secretary of the National Council urged the Commission on Literature to extend its concern and examine the problem of censorship in terms of the arts and the need of the churches to raise up responsible persons in a mass society who are capable of exercising personal judgment in these matters. While this is an issue involving the Department of Religious Liberty, the approach of the Department's committee has been in terms of literary and artistic canons informed by a theological perspective and concern for the exercise of Christian responsibility. An initial paper on the subject was circulated and

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discussed in a subsequent meeting of the Commission on Literature; a committee including ministers and religion professors and the editor of *The Yale Review* was asked to present another document for circulation to other Commissions, the Department of Religious Liberty, the Broadcasting and Film Commission, with further use of these studies to be determined by the Division of Christian Life and Work and General Administration.

A Departmental project of great importance, we believe, is the study of the popular arts in a mass society which will be initiated next year. An appropriation of \$2,000 from the Department of Evangelism of the Congregational Christian Churches will launch the beginning of this study. The grant is being made because of the belief that evangelism cannot be effective in our society unless the churches understand the guiding images of people today. In the words of the study document "The Church, the Arts, and Contemporary Culture," it is necessary for us to know our contemporaries

in all that concerns their values, loyalties, way of life and assumptions in connection with the novels they read, the plays and films they see, the music they play and hear, the buildings in which they live, work, and worship, the social symbols they revere, the dreams and fables, indeed the myths they feed upon. All this plays a large part in the inner life, the color of the self, of a modern individual, from the cultural model of the adult to the hero-paradigm of the child. Here we have the chambers of imagery (Ezek. 8:12) in the heart. Needless to say we have to deal here with the mass media of the great public as well as with the traditional arts and diverse cultural legacies.

The project is designed to assess several of the popular art forms in American society: the comics, the soap opera drama, the popular song, the musical comedy, and advertising art. These expressions of our culture will be assessed to discover the underlying life assumptions and religious attitudes which their appeal suggest are held by people today; in what way is their message negative to Christianity; in what way may these popular art forms be carriers of positive religious content. The study will make use of pastors, theologians, sociologists of culture, creators of these art forms, and critics. While we will not exhaust an analysis of these arts in understanding our times obviously, a significant beginning can be made.

In the opinion of many the clergy are central in any attempt to raise the level of the arts in the churches and to enable the churches to make full use of their potentialities. Accordingly, the Department has proposed a survey of the arts in theological education. The provisions of the recently concluded study of theological education in America did not permit the directors of the project to do more than to allude to the arts as one of the growing edges of theological training. Out of this survey we expect to have a better understanding of what kind of study materials, resources, and leadership training are needed. The term "parson" arose at a time when it was expected that the minister was the representative in the community of what it meant to be a "person." Seminary students themselves share in the belief that for a minister to be untutored and inexperienced in the arts is to lose a dimension of personal existence and to be unprepared to bring all the riches of Christian experience to bear upon the life of a parish.

Even before such a study is made it is apparent that theological seminaries are in need of portable or traveling exhibitions of good art, good design, and good architecture. It is distressing to have numerous requests for such exhibition material come to the Department office from theological seminaries and student groups and to have nothing available to meet their need. The development of traveling exhibitions is a high priority in the Department's list of projects. For the demand is not limited to theological seminaries but arises from student Christian groups in colleges and universities, denominational agencies and conferences, and local churches. It is a need which must be met.

In addition, there is a swelling tide of interest in religious drama. The needs of the churches alone are enormous. As a beginning we have outlined a drama project which includes a reference and circulating library, a consultative service to denominations and churches in drama matters, and a program of commissioning some of the better playwrights of our time to write for the Church.

To list all the activities and all the examples of service by the Department to the churches and to other units of the National Council demands space that is not available in this report. But after pointing to some of the achievements of the Department during its brief existence, it is necessary to indicate problems as well. When set over against the needs of the churches and the wide range of projects proposed by the Commissions and planned by the Department, the achievements seem distressingly small. For what the Department has

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attempted to do in the past triennium is to overcome the hiatus between Protestantism and the arts which has prevailed for generations and in some cases for centuries. The legacy of neglect, indifference, and occasional hostility is of such magnitude that merely to initiate conversation and establish communication through a common vocabulary is a program for decades rather than years. But on every hand is mounting evidence of interest in the arts among younger churchmen — college and university students, theological students, and ministers. Their eager interest and the needs of religious educators requires leadership and guidance. This the Department is attempting to give to an increasing degree. To the extent that some significant achievements can be recorded, it is due in large measure to the enthusiasm and dedication of persons professionally involved in the arts who have given time and energy to the Department.

The contribution in thought and participation by the churches has not matched the contribution of persons in the arts. Until a parity of participation is established and the Department receives financial support commensurate with its task, the Church will have failed to use some of its strongest allies in its witness to our total culture and in the Church's life and work. The Department is making progress in bringing the churches and some of the best resources from the field of the arts into communication; but if the Church is to assume its responsibility in proportion to the seriousness of the problem, there are even greater tasks ahead than have been undertaken thus far.

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